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"IT'S MY BIRTHDAY!" SAID DIGBY. "I THINK YOU MIGHT STAY AND TALK TO ME."

AN UGLY LITTLE GIRL.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was the capital of the Midlands, the big bustling town which had not then acquired the dignity of "city" conferred on it in later years. Birmingham ten years ago, but not the Birmingham seen by the strangers who perambulate New-street, or look with admiring eyes on its newer rival Corporation-street. Oh dear no; the big Midland capital has its slums as well as London. Within a mile of the new buildings which testify to its wealth and prosperity were some very dingy thoroughfares, and one of these, a long, monotonous stretch of tall, narrow houses, rejoiced ten years ago—and perhaps does still—in the appropriate name of Lower Grub-street.

Of Higher Grub-street no one ever heard, perhaps such a place did not exist. If it was to resemble its poorer sister, it was to be hoped it had been improved off the face of the earth; for

Lower Grub-street was not an inviting locality. There was a monotony about its houses depressing to the nerves; the huge Board School at the corner kept it well supplied with noise, and it was a great quarter for cheap lodgings. Between eight and nine in the morning and six and seven at night a long stream of clerks and shopmen were to be seen starting to or returning from their daily toil. Not a cheerful stream of people by any means, for as soon as a man began to "get on" in the world he speedily left Lower Grub-street. It was emphatically the quarter of the struggling.

Miss Mason lived at 299, and she was the oldest inhabitant of the street, not in age, but in length of tenure. She was a tall, angular-looking woman of fifty, with iron-grey hair and a rusty black dress. Presumably the spinster had a new gown sometimes, but she always looked exactly the same. The fashion and material never varied; perhaps her Sunday dress was a trifle less rusty than her week-day one, but it would have need'd very sharp eyes to detect the difference.

Upstairs in the attic of the tall grim house a young girl stood looking out of the window.

Marjory Digby was Miss Mason's niece, factotum and drudge. The spinster hated her, and only kept her because she was too proud to let her sister's child go to the workhouse.

Marjory had lived for ten years in the unlovely district of Lower Grub-street. She most certainly earned her board and lodging by her constant labour, but it was Miss Mason's theory her niece was a great burden whom only her generosity put up with day by day. Marjory was taunted with her dependence until the girlish heart ached with strange yearning pain, and she longed with an intense longing to go away—anywhere so that she was free from her aunt's reproaches.

She could see very little out of her window; trees did not flourish in that part of Birmingham, the smoke from the factory chimneys would not have suited them, but at least there was the sky. On a summer's day it looked positively blue, and in winter on a clear frosty night Marjory loved to watch the stars come out one by one; the sky was the lonely girl's friend and confidante. She felt less miserable gazing up into its vast vault.

"Marjory, Marjory," sounded her aunt's fret-



ful complaining voice, "come down directly, I'm going out, and I want to speak to you first."

Marjory was eighteen, and dressed becomingly,—without the scared, wistful look on her face she would have been a very pretty girl. As it was, her blue-grey eyes had a kind of pathetic entreaty in their depths, her cheeks were too pale for health; a hideous dress of rhubarb-coloured stuff made her complexion look almost ghastly, and her brown hair was cropped so close it could not nestle in little rings and waves on her forehead as would have been its way under happier circumstances.

Mrs. Johnson next door, who, from long years of neighbourhood had always taken an interest in the people at No. 299, declared Marjory looked like a charity child that had outgrown her clothes; and the simile was not a bad one.

The girl ran down and met her aunt in the hall, or rather passage, since it was not more than three feet wide.

Miss Mason was dressed for going out. Her lodgers never returned till seven, being "gentlemen in business," so there were no demands on her culinary skill in the afternoon. She let two sets of rooms and sometimes three. It was a great subject of lament with her just now, that she had all her house empty except the parlour, which were tenanted by an affable book-keeper of German extraction and his brother. They were quiet and gave little trouble, but Miss Mason was anxious to increase the number of her inmates.

"Now remember, child," she said, sharply, as Marjory gave her the green umbrella which she used equally for sun and rain, "you are not to leave the house till I come back. Someone may be after the lodgings, and that chit Susan never understands a message. The drawing-room floor is twelve shillings a week, the top bedroom and use of sitting-room seven and sixpence. There are no extras, and my lodgers stay for years and only leave me to be married. Mind you mention that. If we don't get someone soon, I shall send away Susan or we shall be ruined."

Susan was retained at the sum of a shilling a week and her board which, under Miss Mason's auspices was of the plainest. As she did all the washing and was generally busy from six in the morning till late at night, she could hardly have been regarded as an expensive investment; but "unless the rooms let" Susan was doomed to dismissal.

"I shall have a cup of tea with Mrs. Muggins," said Miss Mason, as she departed. "It's not worth while to make any for yourselves, Marjory. You can take a thick slice of bread and butter, and give Susan the same, that'll save washing up the tea things."

Marjory Digby was not greedy; but she was a woman, and shared the affection of her set generally for a cup of tea. She was tired and depressed, the little brown teapot would have been a kind of "pick me up" to her; but she said never a word of complaint, only went down into the kitchen to convey her aunt's message to Susan.

"Law, and the missus is as mean as a skin-flint," was the girl's reply; "but don't you fret, Miss Marjory. The parlours left a good drop in their pot this morning and I'll heat it up and toast the bread—which is as stale as can be—and you won't feel the same creature when you've had a cup of hot tea and a slice of Frizzy Jack."

It was that unpleasant time of year—unpleasant that is to the friends of such economical housekeepers as Miss Mason—when fires though a comfort are hardly to be regarded as a strict necessity. Not a spark was allowed anywhere but in the kitchen, except at the lodgers' expense, so it was a real enjoyment to Marjory to accept the brown windsor chair Susan placed for her by the cheery glow, and to give herself up to the delights of Frizzy Jack!

The bread was, as Susan had remarked, very stale. Miss Mason had left out the smallest modicum of butter, but the uninviting-looking slices being toasted on one side, and judiciously warmed on the other, became, as though by magic, transformed into a tempting delicacy. Susan

gave her young mistress the largest share of the warm tea, and the meal was a pleasant one to both the little maid-of-all-work and Miss Mason's unpaid charge.

"Will the missis be late?" asked Susan, as she removed all signs of the feast.

"She's gone to Mrs. Muggins' and she may stay to sea."

"The parlours is going to the theatre to-night, and won't want nothing but a bit of bread and cheese when they come home. There's nothing much to do, Miss Marjory, and it won't be dark for another hour. Why don't you go for a walk?"

Marjory shook her head.

"Aunt Hannah wouldn't like it, and I've nowhere to go to."

"Ha'n't you got no friends?" demanded Susan, who was a loquacious young person. "Law, now, I thought everyone had, unless they were brought up in the workhouse like me."

Marjory felt dimly she owed her maintenance to charity quite as much as Susan could do, only the little maid was indebted to the ratepayers' benevolence, and Marjory to her aunt Hannah's.

"I've no friends," she said, slowly. "My father died before I can remember, and there's no one belonging to me but Aunt Hannah."

The little servant was a good three years Marjory's junior, but she was far more worldly-wise and sharper in everyday matters than Miss Mason's dreamy, wistful niece.

"She's an hard'un in the missus," said Susan, thoughtfully, "and you're no more like her than chalk is like cheese. If I was you I'd try and find out your other relations. They might be better than Miss Mason, and they couldn't well be worse."

No; Marjory's heart endorsed that last sentiment. They could not well be worse. No love or kindness had ever been her portion since she could remember; but, years ago, her lot had been just a little brighter than it was now. Her father had lodged a sum of money in a lawyer's hands for the benefit of his infant child. While Mr. Fleming sent a small remittance every quarter Aunt Hannah had been far less fault-finding. The payments ceased abruptly when Marjory was fourteen. The lawyer died then, and his son and successor, a young man with very sharp ideas of business, told Miss Mason he knew nothing of the trust, had never even heard the name of Digby, and therefore her niece could have no possible claim on him.

Marjory's reflections were interrupted by a loud, resounding knock at the door. Susan looked disconsolately at her dirty apron and untidy hands.

"I'll go," said Miss Digby, quietly. "It's only someone about the lodgings."

"Then I hope to goodness they'll take 'em, miss," responded Susan, "for perhaps that'll put your aunt in a better temper, and if they're anything like the German gents, they can't be much trouble."

Marjory, neat and tidy as care would make her, but her girlish beauty quite obscured by her hideous dress, opened the door just as the knocker was about to descend for the second time. A surprise awaited her. In several years' acquaintance with her aunt's lodgers Miss Digby had grown quite experienced in the appearance of likely tenants, but she had never seen anyone in Lower Grub-street to compare with the young man before her.

Birmingham men of the lower middle class are apt to present a stunted appearance, as though the smoke or constant noise of factories had stopped their growth. The new-comer, however, was well over six feet. His broad shoulders and sunburnt face told of plenty of outdoor life, and pastimes. His suit was of rough tweed, but it suited him perfectly, and fitted well, as ready-made clothes never fit with the best intentions. He was about twenty-five, with a frank, handsome face, and dark, lustrous grey eyes.

"He won't do," was Marjory's unspoken verdict. "He is so very big there would never be room for him to breathe here."

A loud she asked, gravely.—

"Did you want to see the rooms?"

"Yes." His voice had a ring of cultivated refinement which was music to Marjory's ears. "A Mr. Hofman told me Miss Mason might be able to accommodate me. We are in the same firm."

"Mr. Hofman has lived here two years," replied Marjory, trying hard to remember whose books the prosaic middle-aged German kept. "My aunt is out now, but I can show you the rooms she has to let."

The stranger followed her upstairs into the dull, ugly drawing-room. This apartment was the pride of Miss Mason's heart, but it did not seem to impress him particularly.

"And the terms?" he asked, quietly.

"Twelve shillings a week. I think my aunt might take a little less if it is for a permanency."

The young man shuddered—actually shuddered.

"It won't be; at least I trust not, I hope not."

Marjory looked so bewildered that he tried to explain.

"I am not used to business life," he said, with some constraint of manner. "I am country born and bred. Circumstances have made me thankful to accept a clerkship in the firm of Gedall Brothers, but I don't want to spend my whole life in writing letters about pens. I still hope some lucky breeze may waft me to more congenial pursuits."

He had begun awkwardly; he ended confidently, for the girl's face seemed to answer him. He felt certain, from the look in her eyes, that she understood and sympathised with him.

"I know," said Marjory, wistfully, "you feel as if you were in prison. I often feel like that myself."

He looked at her with more attention than lie had yet given her. At first he had taken her for a child. He saw now that she was a woman with a woman's power of suffering.

"Are you a prisoner, too?"

"I? Please don't talk of me. Do you think the rooms will suit you?"

"I will take them at once if you think your aunt will agree. I shall not be much trouble, for I am a quiet enough fellow. Shall we consider the bargain settled, Miss Mason?"

"My name is Digby," corrected Marjory, quietly. "My aunt is Miss Mason; my mother was her sister."

"How strange," said the young man, lightly. "My name is Digby too, but I have a more prosaic title to follow. I am Digby Blake, at your service."

He had returned with a small portmanteau and taken possession of the drawing-room—where Susan had kindled a fire—when Miss Mason appeared on the scene and heard of his advent.

"Did you ask for references?" she demanded. "I—I forgot it," stammered Marjory; "but I am sure he is a gentleman, you can see it in his face."

"I don't believe in faces."

"And Mr. Hofman recommended him to come here. He is a clerk in Gedall's."

Miss Mason, who knew all about Gedall's and their famous pens, was mollified. She went up to interview her lodger, and she returned declaring he seemed a very respectable young man, though terribly shiftless and unused to looking after himself. It was easy to see he had never lived in lodgings before.

And Mr. Hofman confirmed this testimony. He had known Mr. Blake for years; had, in fact, been his tutor once during a summer he spent in Germany to learn the language. The young man had been brought up to believe himself the heir of an ample fortune, and never expected to have to earn his own living.

"But there's many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip," quoted the worthy gentleman, "and he's had some downfall. Digby Blake was always a proud fellow, and I'm not going to bother him with questions. He's come a cropper somehow, and was very glad to be taken on at Gedall's at two pounds a week; but he's as steady as time and as honest as the day, so you might go farther and fare worse, ma'am, in seeking a lodger."

And at the end of a month Miss Mason was

quite ready to echo the sentiment ; she had never had an inmate who gave her less trouble than Digby Blake. He never rang the bell to give an order at unwanted times. He took whatever she provided and never grumbled. His money was regular to the day. In fact she set him down as quite a model young man.

"He may be that," remarked Susan to Marjory, "but there's something terrible the matter with him. He grows thinner and paler every day, and it's my belief, Miss, he's got something on his mind which is just eating the life out of him."

Susan, though only fifteen, was a shrewd observer and Marjory felt impressed by this statement. Only the next day she met Mr. Blake in the little passage. He had come in a little earlier than usual, and she was on her way to light the drawing-room gas in preparation for his tea.

Yes, Susan was quite right; he did look ill. The healthy brown tint had faded from his cheeks, his step was weary and listless; his face looked weary and worn. Miss Mason had gone out shopping. A strange pity seized on Marjory, and she said, impulsively,

"I am afraid Birmingham doesn't suit you, Mr. Blake; you look so tired."

"I am tired," he said, gravely; "but I don't think it's only that makes me feel down. The loneliness of the life is killing me. Do you know," and he looked at Marjory with a sad smile, "I never knew a day's solitude till I came here."

They were in the drawing-room now. Marjory lighted the gas and stirred the fire into a brighter blaze, then she turned to go. Digby looked at her eagerly.

"Couldn't you stay just five minutes and talk to me. I am so awfully dull."

"I will go and fetch your tea-tray. I know it is all ready."

But when she had placed the simple meal on the table Digby's eyes still entreated her to linger.

"It's my birthday," he said, sadly, "I think you might stay and talk to me."

He had pulled a chair forward to the fire for her. Marjory sat down on the extreme edge. She could not refuse his appeal, and yet she knew if Miss Mason returned and found her in the drawing-room the vials of wrath would descend upon her head.

"You should ask Mr. Hofman and his brother to come up and see you," she remarked, gravely, "they would be company for you."

Digby smiled with almost boyish mirth.

"Dear old Hofman's the best fellow going, but he will talk of pens, and I have quite enough of them in the day-time. As to his brother, he's a conceited prig whom I detest."

"So do I."

"Why, I wonder ?"

Marjory blushed crimson. Digby, who had been watching her was amazed : the colour lent a new strange beauty to the girlish face, while it lasted she was simply lovely ; then the blush faded, and she was only a plain, awkward-looking child in a rhubarb frock.

"I—don't know. He is so conceited."

"Granted," said Digby, simply, "and he's a snob !"

"What is a snob ?"

Mr. Blake paused to deliberate.

"Some one who pretends. Now old Hofman isn't a gentleman, he puts his knife in his mouth, misplaces his 'h's,' and has a few other little tricks which grate on one ; but he isn't a snob, because he doesn't pretend to be a gentleman ; but Karl sets up to be an elegant man of fashion, and—he's a snob."

Marjory nodded.

"He told Aunt Hannah it was not fit for me to go to the free concerts at the Town Hall—I've hated him ever since."

At that time there were organ recitals from three to four, when the admission was free ; to attend them had been Marjory's greatest treat, and since it cost nothing her aunt had not denied her the pleasure till Karl Hofman interfered.

"What business was it of his ?"

"None, but he is—horrid. He told Aunt Hannah the streets were so full of a Saturday afternoon I ought not to walk home alone."

"And you are fond of music ?"

"I love it better than anything in the world. One of aunt's lodgers was an old professor, who gave lessons on the piano. He taught me and let me go into his room to practise."

"Where is he now ?"

"In Italy. He had saved a little money, and he longed for home. I missed him terribly, and his piano too."

"I haven't got a piano, but, like you, I am passionately fond of music, and I have been to two or three recitals at the Town Hall. There is one to-morrow : why not go with me there ?"

"But—Aunt Hannah ?"

"I believe I am rather a favourite with Miss Mason, and I will try my powers of persuasion. Don't refuse," and a sad strain came into his voice, "don't make me think I am such an utter pariah you won't trust yourself to me for two hours."

"I should be delighted to go with you if Aunt Hannah will let me."

"Only there is still a 'but' in your tone ; won't you tell me what it is ?"

Again a crimson blush made her beautiful for a minute.

"I am so shabby," she said, simply, "and I—I thought you might be ashamed of me."

Digby Blake stretched out his hand and took the little fingers into his grasp.

"You are never to say such a thing again," he answered, firmly. "I think, Miss Marjory, you and I are partners in misfortune. You are alone in the world ; I—have lost home and fortune at one blow. As our fates are so similar I think we ought to be friends. Will you take me for your friend and comrade ?"

The girl fixed her beautiful eyes upon his face.

"I should like to have you for my friend, Mr. Blake."

"Then it is a bargain," he answered, and at that moment the sound of a latch-key in the lock announced Miss Mason's return.

CHAPTER II.

ABOUT as far from Birmingham as well could be—which, seeing the first-named place is in the centre of England, was not so very far after all—in the heart of Sussex, there stood a pretty little village called Kingswood, shut in from the outside world and the sea-coast by the South Downs. Kingswood was a quiet retired place, a little behind-hand in the matter of railways and telegrams, conservative to the back-bone, and devoted heart and soul with feudal loyalty to "the family," as the Digbys were always called by the villagers. The beautiful old castle was the pride of every rustic heart, from time immemorial it had been in the same hands ; one baronet had transmitted the fair castle to another, until now the grand old race seemed likely to die out, for want of heirs, since Sir George Digby was three-score years and ten, and no child of his survived.

The eldest son had been a scapegrace who joined with his father to cut off the entail, an act which seemed little short of sacrilege in the eyes of the simple country-folk ; his brother died unmarried ; the one daughter of the house left an only son, whom every one decided would of course be master of Kingswood, though at Sir George's death the baronetcy must be extinct.

Sir George was devoted to the lad, who was brought up at Kingswood and given all the privileges of heir to the grand old place. Whatever Digby did—the lad had been christened Digby after his mother's family—was right in the old man's eyes ; when suddenly, without a word of warning, a quarrel arose between the two, so sharp and bitter, that it resulted in a parting. Young Blake left the Castle to go no one knew whither, and Sir George and Lady Digby seemed to their humble friends to age suddenly after his departure, as time and sorrow had never had the power to age them before.

The exiled heir's name was never spoken in his grand-parents' hearing, his picture was removed from its place in the library, it was as though poor Digby had never been. Only the old servants, who

had loved him dearly, spoke together in the long, quiet evenings of the missing man, and marvelled what he could have done to merit such extreme measures.

"He never did merit them," said Mrs. Lindsay, the old housekeeper, to her cronies one night, "and that I'll stake my oath on. Master Digby was loyal and true, and if the rights could be discovered we should find he was sinned against not sinning."

The solemn butler nodded ; he was not given to much speech, but he quite endorsed his old friend's testimony.

"If you ask my opinion, Mrs. Lindsay," put in the valet, sagely, "I'd say it was that there French minx had been the undoing of Mr. Digby."

The company—some half-dozen of the upper servants—turned round to stare at Charles ; this was the first time since Mr. Digby's departure that anyone had ventured to guess the reason of his offence. The French minx (otherwise Angela de Lisle, or Miss De Lisle as she was called by Sir George's orders, for the old baronet tried hard to forget her French origin) was not a favourite at the Castle. Her uncle adored her, gentle Lady Digby thought her "very clever," but from the moment of her coming among them the servants all detested her.

Mr. Deacon, the butler, looked at the valet keenly, and then brought his fist down on the table as though his mind was quite made up.

"I reckon you're right, Charlie," he said, shortly. "Of course I knew the French miss wanted to marry Mr. Digby and share his inheritance. I suppose when she saw he didn't fall in with her plans she thought she might as well enjoy it alone."

"That's it," said Charles, gravely, "and whenever that time comes I shall give warning. I don't look on Miss de Lisle as one of the family, and I shouldn't demean myself by serving her."

"But its fifty thousand a year," gasped Mrs. Lindsay, "and a sight of property ; besides the master couldn't go for to leave it all away from Mr. Digby."

"You don't know what lies she"—Charles jerked his finger in some fanciful direction, as though to indicate Miss de Lisle—"has told him, I believe she's made the case black enough against Mr. Digby, though I've no idea what she said."

While this conversation went on in the housekeeper's room Lady Digby and her niece were alone in the drawing-room. The mistress of the castle reclined in a low chair, a beautiful, queenly woman, in her velvet and diamonds, though she looked ten years older than she had done twelve months before, there was a strange shadow on her face, which told of some ever present grief ; Angela, however, looked in the highest spirits.

Miss de Lisle was five or six and twenty, but she always gave people the impression of extreme youth ; she was so small as to have almost an infantile grace ; her beautifully proportioned figure gave her a fairy-like appearance. For the rest, her black hair was coiled high on her pretty head, her eyes were large and brilliant, her colouring a shade too vivid to be natural ; she wore soft trailing robes of canary-coloured silk, half shaded in costly lace—a becoming toilet, but one hardly suiting the rôle of a poor relation, though Angela affected.

"You are tired to-night, aunty," she said, crossing from the piano to the fireplace, near which was Lady Digby's chair.

"A little. Give me that shawl, Angela, I feel cold."

Miss de Lisle folded the pretty wrap round the old lady. Then she sank down on her knees on the soft fluffy fur rug, and looked up into her aunt's face.

"You are thinking of Digby," she whispered. "Dear lady, will you never forget the past ?"

"At seventy-five, Angela, one is not good at forgetting, and the past is dearer to me than the future ; but you are right, I was thinking of my boy."

Miss de Lisle tried to caress the white fingers, but Lady Digby drew them away. There were times when she could not bear even to look at

Angela—when, without guessing her wickedness, she well nigh hated the girl just because she stood in her boy's place.

"If he thought of you," said Angela, bitterly, "he would write and give you news of himself, and not leave you in suspense."

Lady Digby looked into the fire.

"Day by day, Angela, the doubt tortures me. We never had any proof, you know. What if the boy should be innocent after all?"

Miss de Lisle stirred the fire before she answered, quietly.—

"It seems to me that you had every proof. Uncle George had missed sums of money repeatedly from time to time. At last he set a trap for the thief. In the drawer where he had been used to keep his gold he placed a roll of bank-notes, of which he had taken the numbers carefully. You know as well as I do that one of those notes was traced back to Digby."

The old lady sighed.

"I know that, but his demeanour when accused of the theft was not that of a guilty person. He seemed too proud to defend himself, not unable to do so."

"I don't know about that. He tried, I think, to cast the guilt on some one else. He declared that he had had the note from a friend. Then when he found it was stolen he changed his tone, and said, loftily, his grandfather ought to know him well enough to take his word that he had not come by the note unjustly."

"I only wish my husband had trusted him," said the poor old lady. "My boy never did a dis honourable act in his life. His blameless conduct from boyhood ought to have spared him such a charge."

Miss de Lisle looked angry. It was really wearying to argue with people who had such unworldly ideas as Aunt Nora.

"The question is this," she said, coldly, "if Digby did not take the note who did?"

"I have no idea."

"Remember, the petty thefts extending over several months stopped directly my cousin left the Castle. For the honour of his name, Sir George never mentioned his suspicions of Digby. Granting for a moment the thief was another person, why did he suddenly cease his speculations?"

Lady Digby groaned.

"I know it looks black against Digby," she said, sadly, "but I shall never believe him guilty. He is as like his mother."

"Mrs. Blake must have been a handsome woman!" remarked Angela.

"My children were all handsome," said the old lady, proudly, "all handsome and true. Even poor Nugent though he was wild and reckless, would never have told a falsehood or injured a creature more helpless than himself."

"Nugent was the eldest, wasn't he?"

"Yes. He and his father cut off the entail. Nugent declared Walter would make a better squire than he could do; but you see it was not to be. Walter died at twenty-nine."

"Was he married?"

"Oh, no. He never had time for love-making. Not like my firstborn, Nugent, who was in love a dozen times, and always made us afraid he would bring home a low-born wife."

"Digby used to say there was no proof his uncle Nugent had not married."

"He has been dead so long his widow would have made some claim on us before now. No, Angela, you and Digby are the last of the family; and if only things had gone more happily I should have been well pleased for you to fancy each other."

"I am too old for Digby."

"My dear!"

"I mean it, aunty. I am only six months his senior in age, but I feel years and years older. Digby ought to marry a pretty little girl in her teens."

"Poor boy!" said the grandmother, with a sigh, "he will never be rich enough to marry anyone. He may have done wrong, Angela, but my heart yearns for him. I would give my remaining span of life to see him again, and know all is well with him."

She closed her eyes as though to seek repose, but in reality to end the conversation, for Angela's manner jarred on her.

Believing her asleep, the girl presently left the room, for she had an important appointment to keep to-night, and she was rather late for it already.

Safe in the shelter of her own apartment she took off her soft silk draperies and put on a rough serge skirt, over it a plain cloth jacket; a trim black straw bonnet such as upper servants wear, and a thick veil over her face completed her attire; and she went downstairs looking so utterly different from the brilliantly-attired fairy who had left the drawing-room that no one would have guessed her identity at first sight.

No one attempted to do so, for, as Angela had calculated, the servants were at supper. She passed out at the front door, and in a few minutes was walking quickly along in the direction of the shrubbery, thankful that the moon was sufficiently bright for her to find her way with comparative ease.

Someone was waiting for her. In the thickest part of the shrubbery her dress brushed against a man's greatcoat. She almost started, for she had no idea her expected confidant was so near. He took her ice-cold hand in his and said, sharply,—

"Late again, Angela; really, you are too provoking. Do you imagine it's amusing to a fellow to cool his heels here?"

"For my part," replied Angela, bitterly, "you are quite at liberty to stay away. You certainly do not come for my—amusement."

"You would not like me to go to Sir George and tell him everything?"

"You won't do that," she answered, scornfully. "It would be cutting your own throat."

"Listen," he said, in a more conciliatory tone. "It's no use for us to quarrel. Our interests are the same, Angela, and we must sink or swim together."

"Then why are you so cross?"

"My dear," he said, lightly, "at present I have the worst of it. Your rôle shut up with two feeble old folks may be depressing, but at least you have a luxurious home and every comfort at command. The village inn gives me very humble quarters, and even those won't be mine much longer unless I pay up promptly."

"Money!" said Angela, bitterly. "I believe you think of nothing else."

"I think—of you," he answered promptly, "but a man must live. I begin to fancy, Angela, our coming here was a mistake. We have wasted nearly a year."

"But think of the prize. Sir George is so convinced of Digby's guilt that he has drawn up a will making me his sole heiress. Fifty thousand a year and this grand old castle, isn't that a prize worth struggling for?"

"But he may live another ten years."

"He won't. He has broken terribly since Digby went away. I don't think he can last another twelve months."

"But there's the old lady."

"She has her fortune and will want nothing more."

"And you are sure there is no entail?"

"Positive. It was cut off twenty years ago. A good thing for us, as most of the property is 'real' estate and would have gone to that very guilty young man Digby Blake."

"And now—"

"His name is not so much as mentioned in the will," cried Angela, with malicious glee.

"Hem!" said Gilbert, shortly, "then I should advise you two things. First, take great care of that will; next, be sure Sir George does not make another."

"What do you mean, Gilbert?"

"The old man is very fond of you, isn't he? Thinks all you do perfect!"

"Yes—but—"

"My dear, till you came to fascinate him he was very fond of Mr. Blake, and, as I hear on good authority, was led by that young man in all things. Old people are invariably changeable, Angela, and as health declines they have a strong habit of turning back to the affections and pre-

judices of their youth. If you recollect that for twenty years Digby Blake was the Baronet's idol, while he never set eyes on you until about twelve months ago,—why, I think you will understand my meaning."

Angela nodded.

"The will is in London safe enough, and I shall take care he has no chance of making another. Sir George believes in me implicitly, but I am not so sure of aunt Nora."

"You mean that she suspects the truth?"

"She has not an idea of that, but I fancy she thinks my jealousy for the family honour would not have been so keen but that Digby's disgrace made me Sir George's heiress."

"Ah! Well, Angela, we must get to our own business. Money I must have. Do you think it would be safe for me to use those notes? The bundle is still locked up in my desk. It seems hard to be in such an exceedingly hard-up condition when I have over a hundred pounds in my possession."

"I am sure it would be dangerous."

"Why? They have banished Digby without a shilling. They must know he would require money, and what would be more natural than for him to change one of those ill-gotten notes?"

Angela shook her head.

"We might bambooze uncle George, but his lawyer would be sure to detect us. Mr. Carpenter simply detests me. He was so angry at what he called uncle's madness that he refused to draw up the will making me heiress of Kingswood. He said before me one day he was positive Digby's innocence would be proved sooner or later."

"But—"

"Don't you see, no one will cash a note for a stranger unless he endorses it with his name? The numbers of all those notes are known at the bank, and when once one of them was paid in it would easily be traced back to you. Granted you had made your escape from Kingswood, Digby Blake's innocence would still be proved and my prospects ruined."

"You think of no one but yourself."

"I think of you. Whatever fortune comes to me you will share. Gilbert, have patience a little longer."

"With sixpence in my pocket!"

"I have brought you some money. It is all I could manage. Five pounds. You see uncle George is always giving me handsome presents; but I have no regular allowance, and he never seems to think I want money."

Gilbert Yorke took the sovereigns and put them in his pocket. His manner grew a trifle more amiable after that.

"Have you any idea where that fellow Blake is?"

"Not the slightest. He has been gone two months now, and nothing has been heard of him since the day he left the Castle. Lady Digby fears he must be dead."

"And you?"

"His death seems too much good fortune to hope for," she answered, with a heartless laugh. "It would make things too easy for us."

"He will hold his tongue," said Yorke, coolly. "If he was idiot enough to face exile and disgrace rather than betray you two months ago he won't let the secret out now. Upon my word, Angela," the man added, brutally, "he must have been perfectly infatuated with you."

"I thought at first I ran some risk," she returned. "I knew Digby was awfully in love with me, but I did not feel quite sure his attachment would stand such a strain. When Sir George asked him who gave him the stolen note he refused point blank to answer. You and I, Gilbert, can't understand such ideas of honour; but Digby Blake is one of those old-fashioned chivalrous men who would suffer anything rather than betray a woman."

"Well, Angela, you've managed wonderfully thus far; only, as I said before, be careful." It was the cruellest plot ever hatched, the basest use to which a woman ever put her beauty; for Angela de Lisle—or rather Angela Yorke, for she was Gilbert's wife when she came to the Castle—had reached Kingswood with but

one end, to make herself her uncle's heiress. First she dazzled Digby with her fascinations, till the poor young fellow was so blindly in love with her that he would have sacrificed all the world for her sake. Then she began her series of petty thefts, culminating in stealing the packet of bank-notes, and arranged so skilfully that the guilt should fall on her cousin. He was going to ride into Chichester one day, and Angela begged him to bring her some books from the leading stationers, jestingly giving him one of the stolen notes in payment.

As she told her husband, she ran some risk; but if Digby had betrayed her she would have brazened it out and declared he invented the story, while her active brain would have foreseen some way of transferring the rest of the notes to her cousin's room, so that they might be proof positive of his guilt; but the last device was not needed. Digby Blake, dumbfounded at the wickedness of the woman he loved, was too noble to betray her. He went out an exile from his beautiful home, leaving Angela to steal his place in his grandfather's heart. He who had been reared in luxury and wealth went forth to earn his own living as best he could.

Digby went straight to London. He would not stay a night at the Castle after his grandfather's cold, cutting words of dismissal, although Sir George had said stiffly he might remain until the next day since it was so late. Mr. Blake sat at the rustic station the best part of the autumn night, and in the chilly dawn took the first parliamentary train to London, arriving with five pounds in his pocket and the bitter knowledge that henceforth he must depend on his own exertions for support.

In one thing Angela had done him good service. His awakening, though cruel and sudden, was complete. He saw the woman he had loved in her true colours, and though he would not purchase his own acquittal at her expense he despised her as much as she deserved.

The first person Digby encountered when he put up at a quiet, third-rate hotel in Bloomsbury was his old German teacher, who had taught him his own language one summer years before when Sir George had sent his heir to spend the long vacation at a German health resort.

The acquaintance had been quite dropped, and the usually stolid Mr. Hofman seemed so overjoyed to meet his ex-pupil that Digby could not have refused his invitation to lunch without positive rudeness. Ludwig, to give him his rather hideous name, had a great deal to say. He had an excellent post in Birmingham, and had even imported a younger brother, who shared his rooms and picked up a living as corresponding clerk. Then suddenly he seemed to perceive Blake was in trouble. He asked very few questions; but when he learned Digby had left his grandfather and was seeking employment he mentioned deprecatingly there was a vacancy at Geddall's. Wouldn't his dear friend apply for it?

Mr. Hofman was only in London for a day on business for the firm. Digby returned to Birmingham with him, was interviewed by the manager, and, that functionary being very much taken with his frank manners and intelligent face, he was promptly engaged at the salary of two pounds a week.

He knew he ought to have thought himself fortunate — that hundreds of worthy young men would have been thankful for such a chance. Digby was not ungrateful. He did feel intensely thankful that he could earn a respectable livelihood without asking a favour of any of his former friends. He did his duty bravely to Messrs. Ged dall, but not all the good resolutions in the world could prevent him feeling the awful isolation of his lot. It was no figure of speech when he told Marjory Digby the loneliness of the life he led was killing him.

Exile from home, his grandfather's want of confidence, ay, and Angela's treachery, he might have borne; but it was the monotony of his days, the want of one congenial companion, which tortured him. There were a good many clerks at Ged dall's, but Digby discouraged all advances from them; he dreaded anyone's

identifying him with the sometime heir of Kingswood Castle. He came straight back to the dreary rooms in Lower Grub-street as soon as his day's work was over, and the three or four hours between his meat tea and bedtime seemed to him well-nigh an eternity, so utterly unused was he, poor fellow, to solitude, and to such dismal surroundings as those of Miss Mason's drawing-room floor.

Ludwig Hofman would have been pleased to bring up his pipe, and chat with one who knew the "fatherland"; but the amiable book-keeper had two pet subjects of conversation which did not interest Digby: the grandeur of the firm he served, and the wonderful talents of his brother Karl, so that Mr. Blake never sought his society out of business hours.

It was his twenty-sixth birthday, and it brought him so many memories of happier days that the poor fellow longed more than ever for a little sympathy, and he detained Marjory talking to him because, of all the people he had met in his new life, this girl-woman with her sad face and lovely eyes seemed most in harmony with his feelings.

He had begun the conversation just from a longing to hear any voice but his own in the ugly room. He had made the offer to take Marjory to the Town Hall out of simple kindness; but before the girl had been gone ten minutes he found that one effort at kindness bringing its own reward. Wonderful to say, instead of yawning away the evening, he found himself thinking quite anxiously of which means would be best to obtain Miss Mason's consent to the expedition. Instead of pitying himself he pitied Marjory, and wondered what strange fate had left the girl in the guardianship of an aunt such an utter contrast to herself.

Friday was Mr. Blake's rent-day. On that night Miss Mason invariably removed the tea-tray herself, and deposited an orange-coloured memorandum book on the table in its place. Occasionally she sat down and exchanged a few words with her lodger. As an aunt Miss Mason might be failure; as a mistress she deserved Susan's title of "skinfint"; but as a landlady she deserved praise. The memory of a young clerk who was engaged to her thirty years before, and died before he was rich enough to think of matrimony, made her heart soften to all struggling young men.

She expected her rent to the day and gave no credit; but, in return, she took quite a motherly interest in her inmates. In the matter of mended socks and well-aired linen they had nothing to complain of. Their tea and sugar were as sacred as though they had been locked up in a patent safe. On their behalf she fought battles with the butcher, and visited the cheapest grocer, so it was little wonder her lodgers—as she boasted—generally stayed with her till they married or left Birmingham.

Mr. Blake was particularly gracious to her this evening. He begged her to sit down while he counted out the exact amount of the "book," complimented her on her tea, and when he thought he had got her into a thoroughly good temper proffered his petition. He was going to the Organ Recital at the Town Hall to-morrow afternoon, would she let her niece accompany him?

"Miss Digby tells me she used to attend these recitals; but now the days are so short you do not like her returning alone. I am not much of an escort; but, at least there is plenty of me to do battle with anyone who molests her."

"That girl is the plague of my life," said Aunt Hannah. "She's always wanting something."

"This want isn't very difficult to gratify," said Digby, cheerfully. "I assure you, Miss Mason, I am quite to be trusted. My grandmother used to call me as steady as time."

"I'll let Marjory go this once," said Aunt Hannah, "if you're sure the child won't be in your way. And if you don't mind, Mr. Blake, I wish you'd tell her a woman's proper place is at home. She'll believe you, perhaps."

"I'll tell her; but she's hardly a woman yet. When I first saw her I took her for a child."

This speech allayed Miss Mason's last fear. Clearly Mr. Blake had no intention of falling in love with Marjory.

"She's no more use than a child," said the spinster sharply. "I've had the care of her for fifteen years, ten here, and five out Sparkbrook way, so no one can say I haven't done my duty by her."

"I suppose she is an orphan?"

"Yes—her mother was my half-sister, a pretty flyaway sort of a girl, with no backbone. She was music mad just like Marjory, and what must she do but go on the boards and sing at some out-of-the-way hall. I've taken care not to let the child know that."

"I shall not tell her," replied Digby, "you may be sure of that, Miss Mason, and I suppose your sister married an actor."

"No, Mr. Digby was a gentleman. He took Gracey away from the music-hall, and while she lived I will own he made her good husband. They never had a decent house like this," and the landlady looked round her with an air of pride, "but lived in lodgings, sometimes very grand ones, sometimes just a poor room in a back street, according to if he was in funds. But I will say that man just worshipped Grace. When she died he brought the child to me, and said he was going abroad. He couldn't stay in England without his wife."

"Perhaps he is alive then after all; people who go abroad and cease writing to their friends don't always die."

"Mr. Digby's dead right enough," returned Miss Mason. "Not that I believe it was his real name. He left a bit of money with a lawyer in Birmingham, and it was he sent me the news of my brother-in-law's death. Till Marjory was fourteen Mr. Fleming paid me twenty pounds a-year as regular as clockwork; then it stopped suddenly, and I went down to the office to find out why. I heard then Mr. Fleming was dead. He had never mentioned even the name of Digby to his son. There were no papers about the trust money to be found, and young Fleming declared he knew nothing about it, and that we had no claim on him."

Digby Blake looked into the fire.

"I should think your brother-in-law left a capital, and that it was the interest you received. If it had been just a sum of money it would be a very odd coincidence it should last just as long as Mr. Fleming's life."

"I went so far as to ask a lawyer's clerk, who lodged with me at the time, what he thought," confided Miss Mason, "and he said we could prove nothing without papers. I'd not have grudged a pound or two to get Marjory her rights, for the girl'll never be sharp enough to earn her own living, and twenty pounds a-year will go a long way with care. Dear me, what a long time I've stayed gossiping, Mr. Blake. Well, Marjory shall go with you to-morrow; but please don't encourage her in her idleness. She's as lazy as she's high!"

CHAPTER III.

MRS. GILBERT YORKE was a far-seeing woman, and she was quite right when she said that James Carpenter, Sir George Digby's family lawyer, detested her. The fair Angela might have gone a step farther, and said he distrusted her.

Mr. Carpenter had no suspicion that Angela was the actual thief for whose crime Digby Blake had been banished from Kingswood; but he felt certain she was her cousin's enemy, and by keeping Sir George's anger ever fresh widened the breach between him and poor Digby.

"Mark my words," he told his wife, who was Sussex born and bred, and nearly as much interested in the Castle family as her husband; "mark my words, Helen, Sir George will live to regret his treatment of young Blake. There's something not straightforward about that girl, Angela de Lisle. She's inherited her French father's cunning as well as his face, and she's as deceitful as woman can be."

Mrs. Carpenter nodded. Their private house

was midway between Kingswood and Chichester, and she was a frequent visitor at the Castle.

"I'll tell you what, Jim, I fancy Lady Digby's beginning to find out Angela. Sir George is as infatuated with his niece as ever, but my lady is not."

"I'm afraid Lady Digby's eyes being opened won't right the wrong. Sir George is breaking fast, and unless he is roused from his infatuation soon, and makes another will, that French adventuress will be mistress of the Castle."

"Then he has left it to her?"

"He has left her everything. It seems his wife positively refused to promise not to reinstate poor Digby as the heir, so she is passed over entirely, and everything, land, houses, plate, furniture, and money goes to Miss de Lisle."

Mrs. Carpenter shuddered.

"And the will is actually signed?"

"Yes. I refused to have a share in such an unfair thing, so Sir George got a London man down to take his instructions. Depend upon it Miss Angela bears me no kindly feeling for my refusal. Her uncle flew into a passion at the time, but I believe in his heart he has liked me the better afterwards."

"And Christmas will be here next week, Jim; I wish we could find poor Digby Blake. He may be starving in a London garret, and if we found him you could give him a stool in the office."

"Helen!" cried her husband, in mock indignation, "my office is not a refuge for disinherited young men—still, I wish we could find the lad."

"Is it true Sir George wanted him to marry Angela De Lisle?"

"I can't tell about that," replied the lawyer. "Digby wished it himself; he nearly quarrelled with me one day because I told him not to trust the fair French woman farther than he could see her."

"Do you know she has a lover?"

"Nonsense! No company is kept at the Castle since poor Digby's disgrace. Angela hasn't the chance to see a man."

"Not at the Castle perhaps, but I saw her walking with a stranger yesterday; it was in Cranley Wood."

"I should like to know what you were doing in Cranley Wood, madam?"

"The boys beguiled me there to see if there was much holly to be found. They had gone on a long way in front, when suddenly I came face to face with Miss de Lisle and her companion. I bowed to her, but she took not the slightest notice; her rôle will be that I was mistaken in her identity when I speak of the meeting."

"And therefore, my dear, you must not speak of it, if you keep silent she will be so curious as to betray herself. Who was the man?"

"The stranger staying at the Kingswood Arms, his name is Yorke."

"What! Mrs. Hudson's mysterious lodger?"

"I didn't know there was anything mysterious about him."

"Alfred was telling me about it, he is doctoring one of the children, and Mrs. Hudson told him a wonderful astronomer was staying with her, he had come down from London on purpose to discover a new planet supposed to be visible nowhere but at Kingswood."

"Has your brother seen this celebrated astronomer?"

"Mr. Yorke sees no one; he has Mrs. Hudson's two best rooms, and drinks French brandy and champagne. He is often deeply in her debt, then he pays suddenly, declaring his astronomical studies so engrossed him he had quite forgotten such a trifling. He smokes, and reads novels all day, and goes out at dusk to look for the star."

"The 'star' is Angela de Lisle."

"Nonsense, Helen!"

"Recollect, Jim, I have a very good memory and capital sight; I don't believe I was ever mistaken in a face I had once seen, and I have seen Angela de Lisle dozens of times."

"Granted! But, my dear, be fair; because you see her in the wood with a stranger, that doesn't prove either that he is her lover or Mrs. Hudson's astronomical tenant."

"I didn't only see them, Jim, I heard them. I could tell you every word they said if it wasn't dishonourable."

"Husband and wife are one," argued Mr. Carpenter, rather Jesuitically; "you had better tell me, Helen."

"Very well; Miss de Lisle said laughingly to him 'Only have patience, Gilbert, and you shall exchange the Kingswood Arms for Kingswood Castle.' He didn't seem at all impressed, and replied, freifully, 'It would be better if you introduced me to Sir George as Mr. Yorke, an old friend of yours who had been very kind to you in other days.' Angela said, sharply, 'You are an idiot, Gilbert, to suggest such a thing,' and then I came face to face with them."

"Was Miss de Lisle dressed as usual?"

"No; she had on a plain serge skirt and thick cloth jacket: if I had not heard her voice before I might not have noticed her. I met Lady Digby the next day at Chichester and inquired for her niece. She told me Angela was still suffering from a nervous headache which had kept her a prisoner the whole of the previous afternoon."

"I begin to think you're right, Helen, and this 'astronomer' is her lover."

"I am sure of it, but that won't bring back Digby Blake or prove his innocence," said the lady, sorrowfully.

"We'll do our best; I expect the servants at the Castle will be our best helpers."

"It's too delicate a matter to confide to servants, Jim."

"But, my dear, Mrs. Lindsay and Deacon are not common servants; besides, they well-nigh worship poor Blake."

"But how am I to get at them?"

"Well, a niece of Mrs. Lindsay's is with your sister in Scotland. Can't you invent message from Marin to her aunt, and deliver it next time you are at the Castle."

"Jim, I shall end by being as wicked as you are."

Helen was lurching with her old friend a day or two later, and, feeling an arch-traitress the while, she told Lady Digby of her wish to speak to Mrs. Lindsay about her niece.

"Lindsay will be delighted with a visit from you," said the kind old lady, "or shall I send for her here?"

"I will go to her, please. When I was a child I used to think Mrs. Lindsay's room the nicest place in the Castle; when we children came up from the Rectory she always spoilt us."

"I wish there were some children for her to spoil now," said Lady Digby, sadly.

The housekeeper received Mrs. Carpenter, with an odd mixture of respect and affection.

"I do hope Maria gives satisfaction, mam. There I think of Miss Lucy, whom I remember a baby, with a house and children of her own."

"I believe Maria is a domestic treasure, but I only made her an excuse for a chat with you, Lizzie," resorting to the old childish name in her eagerness. "My husband told me to try and speak to you about—Mr. Digby."

"Dear heart, ma'm, I've no news of the dear lad. We've no inkling what the cause of the quarrel was, but we've all agreed it was Miss Angela's work."

"Lizzie, he was accused of something he never did, and he was too proud to defend himself, so he let Sir George think him guilty. Unless his friends can prove his innocence in his grandfather's lifetime he will never return here at all."

Lindsay nodded.

"Ay, we all know who's plotting to be mistress here. Your husband's a clever man, my dear young lady, why can't he find out the truth?"

"He has not the opportunity you have. We both think, Mrs. Lindsay, that if only Sir George's eyes could be opened to his niece's treachery he would understand Mr. Digby had been wronged and recall him."

In a few rapid words she told the story of her meeting with Angela in Cranley Wood, and her conviction the young lady held secret interviews with Mr. Yorke, the stranger then staying at the Kingswood Arms.

"Like enough, ma'm. I've noticed myself she 'goes to bed' at nine two or three times a week, and I've heard her maid marvel at her boots being so muddy. But what can we do, Mrs. Carpenter?"

"Mr. Deacon, or one of the men you can trust, had better follow her. The stranger could be arrested for trespassing, as the private part of the grounds has always been kept strictly enclosed. If once it was proved to Sir George Miss de Lisle met anyone clandestinely half our work would be over; but I must go now, or Lady Digby will think me lost."

Mrs. Carpenter had always been a favourite at the Castle from the days when she was a child at Kingswood Rectory; and Sir George, hearing she was walking, ordered the pony-carriage and offered to drive her home himself, and seeing by Miss de Lisle's face she was much annoyed at the idea of a *tête-à-tête* between her uncle and his old friend, Mrs. Carpenter accepted the proposal.

"This is like old times, Helen," said the Baronet, as they started. "We haven't seen much of you lately. I hope Carpenter hasn't put a veto on your visits?"

"Jim always likes what I like," replied the happy wife; "but you know, Sir George, I have three big boys now."

"And fine lads they are, too." Here Sir George sighed. "I hope they'll never cause your heart to ache, Helen, as mine does."

"Don't be angry," she said, gently; "but, S. George, I don't think your heart need ache. I've known Digby all his life, and I'd sooner take word than another person's bond."

"That's what your husband said."

"And it means more coming from Jim, because he is a very sceptical person."

"But the proof was so plain; but perhaps you haven't heard?"

"Jim told me," she confessed. "I know it doesn't sound professional, but he said if I didn't know the truth I should always be asking awkward questions whenever I was at the Castle."

"You know all—and you believe in Digby?"

"Yes."

"But, my dear girl—"

"Listen," said Helen. "For over twenty-five years we all believed Digby the soul of honour. I'd rather judge him by those years than by the paltry charge you bring against him."

"But he changed the stolen note."

"And was made the victim of the real thief. Why, Sir George, it is as plain as daylight. Someone had a grudge against poor Digby and contrived to get the stolen note into his hands."

"He said at first he had it from a friend; then when he knew it was stolen he kept doggedly silent, and would give no explanation at all, only saying I ought to take his word he was innocent."

"And, dear Sir George, if only you had taken it you would have been far happier."

Sir George sighed.

"I've left the property away from him. I've tried to steel my heart against him, and yet, Helen, I miss him every hour of the day. At night in my dreams I see my daughter's face and hear her ask me what I have done with her boy. My wife thinks me harsh, your husband condemns me, but they don't know what I have suffered."

"If only you would give your best efforts to proving Digby's innocence," said Helen, gently. "I think you would succeed. Just put the fact of his changing that hateful note out of your head and try and take my view that it was palmed off on him by the real thief; I believe then you would solve the mystery."

Driving slowly back with his own sad thoughts, Sir George overtook a tall, middle-aged man who was climbing the hill which led to the Castle with slow, faltering steps. It was impossible to mistake the stranger for anyone but a gentleman, and Sir George, seeing his evident fatigue and knowing the road led only to his own abode, stopped the ponies and asked courteously,—

"May I offer you a lift? I am Sir George Digby, and I think you must be going to see me since this path only leads to the Castle."

The stranger answered with a very winning smile.

"It would be most kind of you, Sir George. I have not long returned to England on a year's sick leave, and I find the distance farther than I expected. May I introduce myself as Colonel Aylmer, of the 55th Dragoons?"

"My own old regiment! Delighted to see you, sir. Jump in, and we shall be home in a trice. I do not think I know your name, but I am always pleased to see anyone in the 55th."

"You are very kind, Sir George. My real object in coming to Kingswood was to see your granddaughter."

"My what?" almost roared the baronet.

"Your grandchild, sir. I was with your son on his death-bed. I sent over the papers and letters he left in my care, and I received a note from you saying the little girl would have a home at the Castle. I promised poor Digby on his death-bed whenever I came to England I would seek out his little daughter. Unexpected circumstances have kept me abroad far longer than I anticipated, but you see I have not forgotten my trust."

"Colonel Aylmer," cried the bewildered baronet, "one of us must be mad. I never had a granddaughter. Both my sons died unmarried."

"There is some strange mistake," said the officer, coldly; "but if you will allow me to intrude on you for a few minutes I can prove the truth of all I have said."

They had reached the Castle now, and a groom stood ready to take the ponies.

"Intrude," cried Sir George, heartily. "My dear sir, you misunderstand me. Why, if you could prove to me I had a granddaughter I would bless you on my bended knees. Come into the library and let us explain ourselves. Deacon," as he passed the butler, "see that no one disturbs me for the next hour, and tell your lady Colonel Aylmer will dine and sleep here to-night."

The library at Kingswood Castle was a noble room, running the whole length of the building. A huge fire burned in the grate, and as the Anglo-Indian stretched out his thin, shapely hands to warm them at its friendly heat Sir George caught sight of a ring on his little finger and turned deadly pale.

Colonel Aylmer took off the ring and placed it in his hand.

"Nugent Digby gave it me on his death-bed. I never thought, somehow, of your doubting me, or I might have shown you this before as a token."

"I do not doubt you, sir. Only I feel there has been some strange mistake."

Aylmer nodded.

"I think, if you do not mind, it will be simplest if you speak first. Do you mind telling me what you know of Nugent's last days?"

"Nothing," said Sir George, promptly. "He joined with me to cut off the entail more than twenty years ago. We never saw him afterwards. A few letters came at Christmas and on birthdays. He was leading an idle, roving life, living, I suppose, on the sum I paid him as compensation when the entail was cut off. He wrote occasionally, I fancy, for some newspapers."

"The Daily Critic," put in Colonel Aylmer. "I am younger than I look, Sir George; Nugent and I were schoolfellows, and—though there were two years between us—chums. I saw nothing of him after I left Eton till fifteen years ago, when I was on my way out to India. We sailed in the same vessel, and I recognised him at once. He was going out to make a series of sketches for an illustrated paper. He had commissions to last him twelve months. We renewed the old friendship, and he told me he had been rather wild, and that the entail on the property being cut off he had only his pen and pencil to look to. There was a deep black band on his hat, and he told me it was for his wife."

"If our child had been a boy," he went on, "I might have regretted Kingswood, but as it is it's all for the best. I can always earn enough for myself and the little maid, and Walter will make a better master of the property than I could ever have been."

"Stop," cried Sir George. "I want to tell you how we heard of Nugent's death. Walter had a letter from a doctor in India enclosing the certificate of his brother's death, and the next mail a few trifles came over that his mother had wept over many a time since—his watch and chain, a lock of his hair, and so on. He told the doctor, it seems, to send them to Walter, lest the shock should be too much for me."

"Sir George, is your second son alive?"

"No; he died only two years after poor Nugent. It was an accident; and though his mother and I set off directly we heard of it, we were too late. They told us his one desire was to last till I got there. There seemed to be something on his mind which he longed to tell me."

"And I can tell it you now—thirteen years after," said the Colonel, feelingly. "He wanted to confess to you that he had suppressed the proof of his brother's marriage and of his niece's birth; that he had sent me a forged letter saying you would give a home to the little girl of whose existence even you did not know."

"And Walter did this?"

"How else can you explain it? I was with Nugent when he died. I took the proofs of his child's parentage from his hand as a sacred trust. I have believed all these years the child he loved so fondly was safe in his father's care."

Sir George clasped his hands in agony.

"And those proofs are lost beyond recall. Colonel Aylmer, I am an old man. I have suffered trouble upon trouble. Have pity on me and tell me how to find Nugent's child."

"Nugent was married at Old St. Pancras Church. His child was christened there. It would be easy enough to obtain fresh copies of the certificates."

"But where is the child? Just think what may have become of her in these fifteen years."

"He left her in the care of his wife's sister, a maiden lady," said Aylmer, who seemed trying to recall facts which had well-nigh escaped his memory. "He told me he knew her aunt would bring Marjory up to be an honest, truthful woman; but she was poor and had a hard struggle herself, so that it was not fair to burden her with the child's support. A sum of money, about five hundred pounds, he left in a lawyer's care with instructions to pay the interest quarterly to his sister-in-law. She lived in some provincial town, I think Manchester."

"And her name?"

"Ransom, I suppose; Nugent's wife was Grace Ransom."

"I shall advertise at once."

"With all due respect to you, Sir George, you must do nothing of the kind. Think if you had a false claimant palmed on you! You had better try to discover what lawyers practised in Manchester fifteen years ago, and write to them in turns till you have discovered the one who was entrusted with Nugent's money."

"You are sure it was Manchester?"

"I am not sure," confessed Aylmer, "but I know it was a very large town. Nugent saw Miss Ransom first when she was singing at some concerts, and I know he told me it made him furious to see what a favourite she was with the factory hands, so I expect it was Manchester."

"My wife will enjoy talking to you, Colonel. She has always longed for news of Nugent's last days. Do you think—" he hesitated. "Would it be possible to keep Walter's share in this business from her? To know his treachery is hard enough for me, but I think it would break her heart."

"It can be managed easily if we let Lady Digby imagine my letters to you miscarried."

Deacon was an invaluable servant, but advancing years had a little impaired his hearing. He could not catch strange names as quickly as he had used to do. His master's voice, speaking under strong excitement, had been more indistinct than usual, and the butler had not heard even the title of the stranger-guest, much less his name. Deacon, therefore, slightly altered the message to his mistress.

"A gentleman has arrived unexpectedly, my lady, and Sir George told me to say he would dine and sleep here. Quite a stranger, my lady."

"How exciting!" said Angela, when the old servant had departed, "we don't often see strangers here, Aunt Nora."

"I expect it is Dr. Melville," said Lady Digby, quietly. "He is an old friend of ours; but has been in Australia thirty years, so Deacon would not remember him. He promised us a visit, but I did not expect him quite so soon."

Deacon's deafness was to have important results; had Angela De Lisle only caught the real name of the stranger-guest nothing would have induced her to meet him. One of her convenient headaches would have confined her to her own room; but as it was, she put on her favourite canary-coloured draperies, and came to the drawing-room without one misgiving.

Sir George and his guest were standing by the fire, Lady Digby had not appeared. The Colonel's back was to the door, and so Angela advanced unsuspecting to her fate.

"Let me introduce you to my niece and adopted daughter, Angela de Lisle," said Sir George; but then he stopped in amazement. Angela had grown white as death, craven fear was written on her beautiful face.

"Your niece she may be, Sir George," came the cold, severe reply, "but you can hardly be aware of her true character if you receive her into your home. In Madras she and her husband ran a secret gambling hell, which lured more men to their ruin than I can count. The authorities caught them red-handed. The man was imprisoned, his wife got off by some legal flaw, though morally she was the guiltier of the two. We heard afterwards that her father was a Frenchman, and she had returned to him. Her husband, Gilbert Yorke, must have finished his term of imprisonment by now, so perhaps he is also enjoying your hospitality."

"Angela," cried Sir George, "speak! Deny these awful charges!"

"She cannot," said the Colonel. "Look at her face! it condemns her more than any words of mine."

The miserable woman made one more attempt at bravado.

"It is false, Uncle George, every word of it. It is a cruel plot and conspiracy!"

"I can bring half-a-dozen fellow officers now in England to prove the truth of my accusation," said the Colonel. "Why, the last exploit made the place ring with her name. The poor lad she duped was one of ours, and he shot himself at her feet. Angel, indeed! some of us thought Demon a more appropriate name."

The miserable creature fled, Sir George turned to the Colonel.

"My youngest sister married, against our wishes, a handsome Frenchman, who ran through her dowry and broke her heart. Dying, she sent me a letter imploring me to befriend her only child. M. De Lisle, however, refused to give up his daughter. I never heard anything more till fourteen months ago, when Angela wrote that her father was dead, and, after supporting herself for five years by teaching, her health had broken down, and if she did not have a few weeks' rest her life might be in danger. For her mother's sake, would I receive her for a brief visit?"

"And in the kindness of your heart you wrote and said 'yes' without making a single inquiry?"

"Something like it."

"That woman," went on Aylmer, "is bad to the core. I know some people who went out in the same steamer with her, and they declared there was not a saloon passenger who did not lose either money or jewels on the voyage. My friends secretly suspected Mrs. Yorke, but there was not a shadow of proof, and she seemed such a general favourite they dared not bring such a charge against her. Later on they noticed, whatever house she stayed at in Madras her hostess always suffered some small loss."

Sir George buried his face in his hands.

"And yet I suspected my boy, whom I had known all my life as the soul of honour. I sent my grandson away in disgrace to lonely exile. I was so infatuated with Angela I let her persuade me of Digby's guilt, and even made my will in her favour."

Colonel Aylmer looked very grave.

"Does she know it?"

"Yes."

"Then you had better destroy the will at once."

"It is at my banker's. I'll send for it tomorrow and burn it."

But the soldier persisted.

"Sir George, you don't know that woman as I do. She is capable of poisoning you this very night. Remember she knows only your life stands between her and princely wealth—tomorrow she makes sure you will alter your will. Take my advice, and make another now."

"Come, come," said Sir George, cheerfully, "you don't see any signs of sudden dissolution about me, I hope?"

"No, but—I fear that woman."

Enter Lady Digby; she had already heard Colonel Aylmer's mission, and rejoiced in the thought of welcoming Nugent's child. Now her husband broke to her very tenderly the story of Angela's treachery.

"Oh! George," and the dear old lady shuddered; "and to think she might have been mistress of Kingswood!"

Miss De Lisle, otherwise Mrs. Gilbert Yorke, left the Castle that night. For his dead sister's sake Sir George settled two hundred a-year on her for life, that—so his letter ran—she might have the chance of leading an honest life. He wound up by informing her he had made a fresh will, bequeathing his property equally between Digby Blake and his cousin Marjory.

That letter sent and the new will signed, the Baronet seemed to enter on a new lease of life, and with Mr. Carpenter's assistance began his two-fold search for his exiled grandson and the unknown Marjory.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS MASON'S little drudge enjoyed the organ recital immensely, and that Saturday afternoon's expedition was the beginning of brighter days for her; for Digby, who, believed his heart had been well-nigh broken by Angela's treachery, awoke gradually to the knowledge that his wild passion for his cousin had only been a young man's first fleeting fancy, and that the tender affection he learned to cherish for Marjory was the true love of his life.

Young Digby Blake did not take very long to decide that even if his grandfather never discovered his mistake he could yet be happy if Marjory were at his side. He told the child very quietly she had become dearer to him than aught in the world.

"I don't expect ever to be rich, darling, the only relations I have cast me off before I came here; but, Marjory, for your sake I shall be strong to fight for fortune. Only promise to be my little wife, dear, and I will see poverty never touches you."

"But you are so far above me," said the girl. "I am nothing but a shabby little thing whom no one wants."

"That's not true, because I want you very much. Marjory, only say 'yes,' and I will behead Aunt Hannah to-night."

The old maid had never loved Marjory, but Digby was a great favourite with her; perhaps she reminded her of the young man she had "kept company with" thirty years before.

Perhaps the thought of a love affair going on under her roof awoke sweet memories of her own youth, for, contrary to Mr. Blake's expectations, Miss Mason listened to him with patience and a certain rough sympathy.

"Oh yes," she answered. "You think you're in love with Marjory, and the child's brightened up wonderfully lately, I'll admit; but, Mr. Blake, love never kept two people yet! Either you'll wear out your lives in waiting—and waiting's dreary work—or you'll make it up with your grand relations and leave that silly little thing to break her heart."

"I shall never leave her. I confess I see no chance of my 'grand relations,' as you call them, coming round, but I'm getting on better at Geddall's than I did. I believe, for Marjory's sake, I can even take an interest in pens. Then they have promised to raise my salary; and I think when it gets to a hundred and fifty we might venture to think of matrimony."

"I think you are a great deal too good for Marjory," said Miss Mason, "but when you are able to keep her I'll not come between you; and I think, Mr. Blake, if you're going to marry the

child, you ought to see Mr. Fleming and make him tell you what he has done with the money."

"But, Miss Mason, I don't want the money; I only want Marjory."

"If Fleming has money of my brother-in-law's he ought to give an account of it. Besides, I've been thinking, Mr. Blake, he may know something of poor Digby's people. My sister always said her husband came of a high family. Any-way, you ought to see him."

"If you will consent to our engagement I'll promise to go and see Mr. Fleming."

But the following morning Miss Mason came into the drawing-room with a face full of importance.

"It's a wonderful world, Mr. Blake. Last night I begged you to go and see Mr. Fleming. This morning there comes a letter asking me to call on him. You'd better read it."

"Any time between eleven and one," quoted Digby. "I can get away for my dinner-hour at half-past twelve if you'd like me to go with you."

"I'd rather," said Miss Mason. "I can drive a bargain with the tradespeople as well as anyone, but I'll confess I can't abide lawyers; there seems something dangerous about 'em."

Mr. Fleming was a young, rather horsey-looking man of some five or six and thirty. He received Miss Mason and her escort civilly enough, and at once plunged into business.

"I've lost a lot of money through a clerk my father trusted implicitly; but I rather think it'll turn out to your advantage. This Turner was run to ground yesterday, and confessed, among other securities, he had helped himself to some bonds and vouchers for railway stock in my father's name, but which, by the accompanying papers, were evidently the property of the late Mr. Digby, and assigned by him to my father in trust for his daughter. Five hundred pounds at four and a-half per cent. produced twenty-two pound two. The twenty was the amount received by you, Miss Mason, and the balance my father's fee. I never cared much about business, and my father left everything to Turner, who was his managing clerk. When you wrote to me about the money I consulted Turner, who assured me he knew nothing of the matter. I fancy he stole the securities, believing he could realise them by using the firm's signature—as he was empowered to do. As a fact, being in my father's private name, he couldn't touch them, and I shall have the pleasure of handing you the accumulated interest for the last four years. It won't be far short of a hundred, so it will come in handy for the *trousseau*," and the young man winked at Digby Blake, who had been introduced as "my niece's future husband."

"I'm sure, sir, you're most liberal," said Miss Mason, who was much impressed by Mr. Fleming's affability.

"Not at all; a mere matter of business."

"You spoke of papers just now," said Digby, gravely. "Would they throw any light on Marjory's parentage?"

"There's no doubt of that," replied the lawyer. "She was this Nugent Digby's only child. The last letter sent from India, just before his death, directs that if her aunt dies or becomes unable to provide for her we were to apply on her behalf to Major Aylmer, of the 55th Dragoons. He's full colonel now, and home sick leave; so if you want anyone to play the part of father at the wedding, Mr. Blake, I should advise you to write to him."

Three days later Colonel Aylmer was ushered into the library at Kingswood Castle. He was not in the least expected; but when Sir George looked at his smiling face he felt quite sure that his friend had good news for him.

The March sunshine poured full into the beautiful old room as the Colonel answered,—

"I had a letter from Digby Blake last night. I started at once, for I felt I could tell you the news better than I could write it."

"You have heard from Digby? Why didn't he write to me? He must have seen my advertisements."

"I don't believe he has seen one of them. Now, Sir George, don't look so gloomy. I assure you my news is of the best. Just listen.

"DEAR SIR,—

"A lawyer of the name of Fleming, who enjoyed the confidence of the late Mr. Nugent Digby, has informed me that you were interested in his only child. I therefore think it right to tell you that, with the consent of the aunt who brought her up, Marjory has promised to be my wife. I am in the firm of Gedall Brothers, Birmingham, and my earnings are a hundred and fifty pounds a-year, so that we think ourselves justified in marrying next month. If for her father's sake you would like to come to our wedding, I will gladly send you particulars of the day and time."

"By a strange chance my dear one and myself are first cousins, both being grandchildren of Sir George Digby. Unhappily a grave estrangement parted me from my grandparents last autumn, and they have never taken any notice of Marjory; but my wife will not be the less dear to me because her father was my mother's favourite brother—I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

DIGBY BLAKE."

Sir George clapped his hands like a child.

"The very thing I should have wished. I'm sure if they'd been living here with me they'd never have fancied each other. Young people are so contrary."

"I shall certainly attend the wedding," said the Colonel, smiling, "but I don't fancy the ceremony will take place from Lower Grub-street."

And it did not. On a lovely day in April a numerous party met at the beautiful old church at Kingswood to witness the union of Sir George's grandchildren. The bride wore a rich white satin dress, trimmed with lace of priceless value; her pretty hair, still too short for plaits or coil, falling in soft curls over her forehead. Happiness had given a bloom to her face, and a gladness to her smile; but yet she was as simple and unaffected as in the old days when she had been Aunt Hannah's little drudge, and had been glad to warm herself at the kitchen fire and eat Frizzley Jack. The very same Marjory, only so much happier.

Miss Mason retired from lodgings soon after the wedding, for Sir George settled a handsome income on her in gratitude for her care of his grandchild. Marjory and her husband lived at the Castle with the old folks till Sir George's death made them master and mistress of the beautiful old place. Lady Digby, a very old lady now, still survives, and delights to spoil the pretty children who have come to gladden her last days.

Digby is fond and proud of his bairns, but his wife holds the first place in his heart. He can never forget it was her love and trust which saved him from despair through those long dreary months in Lower Grub-street. He feels as if he could never do enough to make up to her for all she suffered in her lonely unloved girlhood, when her greatest pleasure was to look out of her attic window into the sky, and watch the stars creep out one by one into the darkness.

Neither Marjory nor Digby ever re-visited Lower Grub-street; but down in their hearts is a deep pity for all those who have to live in such unlovely places. Young Mrs. Blake never looks out of the window on a starlight night without thinking of the days when those same stars were her only friends. She loves to remember that those stars shine still in all earth's dark places, and she hopes that to all lonely, unhappy hearts may come at last a love as true and fervent as that poured out by Digby upon AN UGLY LITTLE GIRL.

[THE END.]

AN extremely rare coin was struck off just at the moment of the assumption of the reins of the empire by Napoleon III. Only the die for the obverse or head of a new imperial coin had been completed, and by some accident, or possibly by mischievous design, a coin was struck off which bore the head of "Napoleon III, Emperor," on one side, and "French Republic" on the other.

THE IVY.

—:-:

"A rare old plant is the ivy green,
That covers decay with its emerald screen ;
It crowns crumpling ruins with its evergreen
wreath,
Making them beautiful even in death.

Its lessons to man are easy to read ;
But Nature's a teacher that very few heed.
If mortal defects were as kindly concealed,
By the mantle of charity, all would be healed.

Oh, give to me friends that are true as this vine,
That the harder our trials the closer will twine.
A prize is true friendship, wherever 't is cast ;
Tenacious, unyielding, true to the last.

AMONG the most ignorant class of agricultural labourers in Norfolk and Suffolk there is a queer idea prevalent concerning the origin of a common rustic acquaintance of ours. They say that, after the creation of man, Satan, fired with jealousy, attempted to rival that masterpiece, but the nearest approach to the human being that he was able to fashion was the toad.

A WONDERFUL necklace is to be exhibited at the Chicago Exhibition. It is the property of a rich merchant of that city. This matchless necklace is composed of three rows of human eyes in a state of perfect preservation, polished and set in a magnificent mounting of virgin gold. These eyes were taken from the mummies in the burying places of the Incas in Peru. Nothing, we are told, can equal the grace and softness of this death-like ornament.

A BAT cannot rise from a perfectly level surface. Although it is remarkably nimble in its flight when on the wing, and can fly for many hours at a time without taking the least rest, if placed on the floor or on flat ground it is absolutely unable to use its wings. The only thing it can do is to shuffle helplessly and painfully along until it reaches some trifling elevation, from which it can throw itself into the air, when at once it is off like a flash.

LUNATICS in French public institutions are invariably treated to "garden influences." They are divided into three categories—harmless, semi-violent, and violent. Each class has its own garden. That of the first is beautifully kept and in perfect trim. The garden of the semi-violent, however, shows traces of the habits of its frequenters. Paths on which locative lunatics incessantly walk to and fro may be noticed tramped on the grass of the lawns. The garden of the violent lunatics can hardly be styled a garden at all, the beds and lawns being trodden underfoot, the walks kicked up, and the greatest disorder and riot existing everywhere. The third class usually takes its horticulture in a straight waistcoat of however, comfortable construction. Each patient also wears a pair of felt slippers padded to his ankles, which he can neither kick off nor use as weapons of attack on his fellow-patients or on his warders.

The eye of the American buzzard, says the *Optician*, must be a unique arrangement. In effect it is practically as good as an opera-glass. The bird can screw it in or out, so to speak, and fit it to the distance across which he wants to look at any object. The eyeball is surrounded by horny plates which move slightly on each other. The muscles at the back of the eye are so arranged that they can thrust the centre of the ball of the eye out in front, and the pressure of these horny plates keeps the whole eye from being pushed out also. Thus the eye assumes a cone-like appearance from the outside. By relaxing this pressure and exerting these muscles in the opposite direction, the front of the eye can be made flat. By this means the buzzard can, while flying at a great height, sweep the ground with his telescopic eye in search of carrion, and as he approaches the earth can keep adjusting his sight so that he sees the desired object plainly, even when it is under his very beak.

THERE are volcanoes all over the world. They occur all along the Pacific coast, on the western side as well as the eastern, all the way from Behring Straits to New Zealand. There are volcanoes in Africa, in the Mediterranean, the West Indies, and even amid the eternal ice and snows that surround the southern pole. Iceland is especially noted for its volcanoes, which have burst forth from time to time in the most fearful eruptions.

AN INVENTION which is a veritable boon to housekeepers is a "firelighter." This consists of a small iron box filled with asbestos, on which a little paraffine oil is poured and lit. The box, which has a long handle, is inserted between the bars of the grate in which the coal has been placed loosely to allow the oil to flame freely. In about a quarter of an hour a really good fire is made, and if wood is used it will ignite, of course, in a much shorter time. With a very little care there would really be no need of kindling wood at all with this little invention.

DESCRIBING marriage customs in Kaso, one of the most southern islands of Greece, a writer in the *Eastern and Western Review*, says the parents upon both sides take upon themselves all the responsibilities of courtship and marriage. Courtship, as we understand it, is not in any way permitted to the betrothed couple. No moonlight walks or *tâle-a-têtes* are allowed. Such a course would be deemed highly reprehensible, and all wooing, if there be any, must take place in the presence of the elders; but there is no great time for repining at these decrees of custom, for the marriage follows the offer as quickly as may be.

THE visitors to the Central Park menagerie, New York, often wonder why fox-terriers are always to be found in the enclosure with the elephants. It is simply because, if they were not there, the rats, which are many and large, would eat the feet of the elephants off. The elephants are chained, and, when they lie down, they cannot keep the rascally rodents from gnawing their feet. So a fox-terrier is kept with them, whose business it is to see that the rats are driven away, or to kill as many as possible. The elephants appreciate the dog too. Lately the rats began to gnaw holes in the thick hide of the rhinoceros. So a terrier was placed with this beast, and in one night killed twenty-seven rats. Rats are one of the greatest pests which the keepers have to fight.

THE curious way in which fishes eat is quite a study. Some fishes have teeth, and some have none at all. In some the teeth are found upon the tongue, in some the throat, and in some in the stomach. Some draw in the food by suction; the sturgeon is one of this class. The jelly-fish absorbs all its food by wrapping its body around the prey it covets. The star-fish fastens itself to its victim, turns its stomach wrong side out, and engulfs its dinner without the formality of swallowing it through a mouth first, much less of asking permission. Then there is a peculiar little crab—the horseshoe crab—which chews up its food with its legs or claws before it passes the morsels over to its mouth; while other crabs and lobsters masticate their food with their jaws, and afterwards complete the work with an extra set of teeth which they find conveniently located in their stomach. So there are all sorts of methods for those regularly toothless, and the fishes which have teeth show almost as great a diversity in the number, style, and arrangement of them. The ray or skate has a mouth set transversely across its head, the jaws working with a rolling motion like two hands set back to back. In the jaws are three rows of flat teeth, set like a mosaic, and between these rolling jaws the fish crushes oysters and other molluscs like so many nuts. The carp's teeth are set back in the pharynx, so that it actually masticates its food in its throat, while the sea urchin has five teeth surrounding its stomach, and working with a peculiar centralised motion, which makes them do as good service as if they numbered hundreds. And these are only a very few of the odd methods in which fishes eat.

TWO WOMEN.

—:-:

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LONG after the midnight hour had struck did Billy Crossley pace to and fro before the closed door of Violet's room. He had crept once very softly into Thurso's apartment, and had beckoned Alice to come to him.

"My love, you will make yourself ill, you can leave him now. Go to bed, Allie, darling," he whispered while he held her in his arms and kissed her most tenderly.

But Allie shook her head.

"I could not leave him, Billy. He is lying just like a dead person. At first I hoped he was asleep, but it is not sleep; it looks as if he could not move, as if something heavy had fallen on him and crushed the very life out of him. I—I am so frightened he is going to be very ill. Come and look at him, Billy."

She drew him into the room and up to the couch where Thurso lay, just in the position he had assumed when first put there. It was evident he was not asleep, yet he did not seem conscious. Allie's description of him was most true; it was really as though some great invisible weight had fallen on him, crushing out all strength and life. Crossley felt his pulse, and laid his hand on the burning brow.

To himself he offered up a hasty wish that his friend Warren might arrive very early the following day.

"The poor chap is bowled over altogether; I am afraid he is in for a bad time. Poor old Dick! I never thought to see you like this."

Out loud, however, Crossley was very careful to convey nothing of this fear.

"Oh! he is only very much knocked up, nothing more. You shall stay with him, dearest, as you are so anxious, and if he wakes up or seems to want anything just call me."

Allie rested in his arms for a moment.

"And I was beginning to feel a little happier to-night," she sighed. "Hester has been so much better. Oh! Billy, perhaps I ought to go to Hester, she will wonder——"

"There is no need, darling, I have told Hester as much as there is to tell, and I have sent her off to bed, where I hope sincerely she is sleeping soundly. Now I am going to put you into this chair, and you——"

Crossley broke off abruptly. Allie had started violently in his arms, and was now trembling throughout her frame.

"Oh! Billy, did you hear that. What was it? What——"

The young man clasped her to him involuntarily; a curious sound had broken the silence of the night—a sort of muffled scream, and then a deep, long, shuddering moan. It came to their ears faintly borne in from the gardens beyond, and beneath the window. They stood motionless for a moment. Allie's heart beat in her throat, she was oppressed suddenly with a most hideous, a most unaccountable horror, and this feeling communicated itself to her lover in no faint degree.

It was an evil moment, the heavy stillness of the country night, the sight of Thurso lying so inert, so absolutely unlike himself. The agitation and excitement of all that had passed in this most eventful night rose now in unison to oppress and overcome the young man's nerves, strong as they were.

He was dazed for a moment with the swiftness and completeness of this horror, but almost immediately he was himself again, and was administering comfort to his little love.

"What a frightened baby it is, to be sure," he said, in assumed tones of cheery chiding. "Don't you know the sound of dog-howlings when you hear it, eh? My little one, your nerves are all upset."

"It was no dog," Lady Alice broke in, hurriedly, speaking in a faint, horror-stricken voice. "That—that was—a human cry. Oh, Billy, this is a dreadful night! Something has happened. I know it—I know it. Go and see—Ah! no!"

The girl clung to him as he hastened to obey this injunction as well as the prompting of his own mind.

"No; you—you may be hurt, too. I don't know what is the matter; but, oh! I am frightened, Billy; I am frightened! I cannot let you go!"

He kissed her several times.

"Love, be brave, or else I shall have to demonstrate great authority and just carry you off to bed without more ado. Come, Allie, darling courage. I shall be back directly, and you will see who is right about the dog—you or I."

He disengaged himself gently as he spoke, and Lady Alice, who was, with all her delicacy, no coward, immediately overcame the most violent portion of her fear, allowed him to free himself and to leave her as he wished.

"Come back directly," she whispered; and she stood looking after him with wistful, nervous eyes as he went away.

Crossley paused a moment outside Violet's door. All was still there. With that strange dread oppressing him he turned and ran fleetly down the stairs into the hall. Lights were still burning; and he was greeted by a fresh breeze blowing through the open hall door and through one or two windows. He remembered all at once how he had promised the butler to do the necessary bolting and barring, and felt his conscience prick him a little that he should have so completely forgotten his promise. Other feelings were, however, so strong upon him that this did not remain longer than an instant. He went through the hall door and paused on the broad step. The fast beating of his own heart was the only sound that came to his ears save the whispering noise that the trees made as they swayed and bowed in the night wind, and the occasional note of a bird in the far distance. The cry that had startled Allie and himself had had something terrible in it. It had carried a weight of agony not to be denied. It was as though it had been forced by some acute suffering of physical pain and fear mingled from the lips that had uttered it. For though to his love the young man had treated it so lightly and dismissed it merely as the howl of some stray dog he knew full well himself that it had been no dog who had cried in that strange, awe-inspiring fashion, though he could not conjecture even faintly the real origin or cause of it; and he was far, very far indeed, from guessing the truth in all its horrible completeness. After a moment he emerged from the hall door into the darkness. It was a very heavy darkness now, that curious spell of blackness that immediately precedes the breaking of the dawn. To see anything clearly was impossible, and the stream of lamplight that fell through the open doorway and windows made the darkness beyond and around only the more dense and difficult. Crossley walked a few steps down the path. The sound of that strange cry had come from the front of the house. Yet, so far as he had gone, he could see nothing, nor could he hear any noise of any sort or kind.

He paused in his walk; he had now come to a point in the path just below the windows of the room where Alice and her brother were, and also the windows of the room in which Violet was confined as a species of prisoner.

Crossley looked about him, he even whistled and called aloud; there was no answer to his voice, however, and he was about to retrace his steps feeling relieved and yet annoyed that he should have allowed a fancied thing to have given him such real distress when a sudden thought came to him.

He had his match-box in his pocket, and even as the thought came he opened the dainty case and struck a light with one of the wax matches.

The wind, cool and decided, though not of course strong, caused this faint glimmer of light to flicker and almost blow out, but before it could be extinguished Crossley had seen a sight worse than any picture that his mind had yet suggested.

The larger window of Violet's room was wide open; from a corner of it there hung a torn shred of something white, fluttering to and fro in the breeze, while below standing out now so clearly

even in the darkness that a momentary feeling of surprise came that he had not seen it before, was a patch of some other white substance that was swathed and co-mingled with a darker mass, a mass that the young man's chilled heart and nerves construed only too well to be a human body.

Instantly he had grasped the truth in all its hideousness. The shock was a most painful one to him, and brought with it almost a feeling of remorse, that his hand should have been the indirect cause of such an appalling disaster.

He groped his way towards that spot and knelt down beside that huddled mass that lay so very still, and he struck another match.

An involuntary shudder ran through his frame as he saw the blood that stained the pretty doll-like face. She had fallen with terrible violence, and the edge of a large ornamental garden vase had caught her as she fell, gashing and maiming her beauty in a shocking way.

How long he knelt there it would have been impossible for him to have said. Thought and action together seemed frozen by this last and worst horror.

He was grieved and troubled beyond all expression, he had harsh angry thoughts for her when she had triumphed so shamelessly in her shame and sin; yet there was nothing but pity, a great overwhelming pity in his heart for her now, and a sorrow that was a pain in the thought of the suffering she had brought on herself.

He was still kneeling in that dull dazed way, when the sound of a voice calling his name softly from the doorway roused him. He staggered to his feet.

"Here—I am here," he said, hoarsely. He clung to a tree for support, as a slight figure came out through the light on the path into the darkness towards him.

"It is I—Hester," the low sweet voice said. "I—overheard you talking with Allie, and I—I—thought perhaps I might be of some use. I found her in great distress of mind about some noise you both heard. So to satisfy her as you were long in returning, I came to find you. Is—is there any thing wrong, Billy?"

He passed his hand over his eyes and struggled to be firm.

"Hester," he said, speaking unsteadily, "you are not very strong, but you are no usual woman. You—you have a heart and a mind brave as any man's. You—you must let them be brave and strong as iron now, for—for you will need all your courage. A dreadful thing has happened. Violet has tried to escape from us. She must have been mad to attempt such a thing. She—she has paid dearly for her madness, and for all her other wrong-doing. She lies here, at our feet, dreadfully hurt and so silent and still I—I fear she must be dead!"

Hester gave a low shuddering cry, and recoiled an instant. The next she had brushed past him and sank on to the ground.

"A light!—give me a light!" she breathed rather than said. "Give me the whole box, and go—go at once, rogue the servants, send them here. She is not dead, she cannot be dead! Oh! poor, poor child—poor unhappy Violet! you must not die like this. Go, Billy, I entreat you. I will stay with her; she must be carried indoors. She is silent; but that does not mean the—the worst. No!" Hester's voice was now clear and full of sudden gladness. "No, she moves, I can feel her heart beat, it is only a swoon, she will recover. Oh! Heaven be thanked! Heaven be thanked for its tender mercy and goodness to us!"

Crossley turned and obeyed her instantly. The relief that had rung out suddenly in her last words gave him hope and courage again.

He went instantly to rouse the butler and other servants, and before another five minutes were gone he was back in the garden leading the way for this succour and help to the spot where Hester Trefusis knelt praying softly, and with tears in her eyes as she held in her feeble arms the moaning injured form of one who had hated her so fiercely that her very life itself had been counted on as the price of that unjust and jealous hate.

She did not die immediately, she lingered for many days. Her injuries were most terrible. From the first it was seen that there could be no hope of recovery, and, indeed, when it was known how shockingly she was maimed and disfigured, and that if life did remain longer in her veins it would be attended with incessant suffering and illness, there was not one of those who surrounded her but prayed silently that she might be spared such future.

She never regained consciousness, the violence of her fall had injured the brain too severely.

All that medical science could suggest or do was done for the poor creature; but in such a case the most gifted human hands were powerless to minister or to heal.

It seemed an irony of fate, indeed, that her worst injuries were brought about by the jewel she had bound about her body preparatory to making her disastrous descent. The force with which she had fallen to the ground had caused the hard gems and their costly setting to inflict bruises, and, in some places, cuts that were most painful to realise.

She lay on the bed in the dainty room which her husband's love and pride in his love had made so beautiful for her; and none looking on the pallid disfigured and bandaged form stretched on the soft pillows would have recognised in this most sad spectacle the laughing, glittering, golden-haired and youthful Violet, Countess of Thuro.

The eyes of those who sat about her longing so desparingly to be enabled to do some little thing to mitigate the sufferings which were so distressing to them to look upon were never free from tears, and yet there was not one, not even the grey-haired broken-down woman who once had been so magnificent in her beauty, and who had loved this poor creature upon the bed with a love passing the devotion of most mothers, who desired to see life linger in the shattered frame.

It was a terrible a most distressing time at Sedgebrook. There was a double sorrow and a double anxiety, for away in another room fighting with death in its grimdest form lay Thurso—crushed by the events of the past almost into the grave and lost to the hideous reality of the present in the mad confusion and fever that had attacked his overwrought brain, while Hester and Helen Campbell sat silent and despairing beside Violet's bed.

Allie was never away from her brother's room. Worn almost to a shadow she waited on him from morning to night, assisted by her lover and by the trained nurses that flitted about the old rooms and corridors of Sedgebrook in soft yet half consoling manner. The world and all its hopes and joys and happiness seemed very far away from Allie and from her lover in this dark, sad moment; while as for Hester it might be almost said that the grim visitor who was hovering so surely about Violet's form and threatening to pass from the wife to the husband had extended his chill destroying hand towards her also. She was very ill, as both Crossley and his friend Dr. Warren saw only too plainly, but no persuasion, no entreaty, no command could get her to move from her place by Violet's bed.

Allie's tenderness failed to woo her, nor could any words of the grief-laden mother shake her from her purpose. She was haunted by the thought that perhaps Violet might recover consciousness and might in such a moment be comforted by seeing her, by her knowing that the wrong that had so nearly been done was forgotten and forgiven.

It would not have been like the Violet of old to have entertained such feelings, but with the mystery and awe of death so close upon her Hester hoped for a great difference, she prayed for some manifestation that the soul of this poor earth child might be freed at the last and so win redemption and eternal mercy before the end came.

Her prayers were not granted, at least in outward form. Violet died unconscious and in silence. She faded away from absolute weakness, and her life passed from her as the dawn was painting the sky with its wondrous golden-red greeting.

The heart of the pure noble girl who knelt

beside her praying for her in this supreme moment was comforted and rejoiced by that light in the sky. It carried a message to her of forgiveness for the poor, weak, erring creature whose days on earth were done, it spoke of a peace and a consolation to those she left behind.

It was as though the Divine Voice had answered her many prayers, bidding her be comforted, for that the soul that was loosed from its human dwelling would be judged not for the evil with which it was stained but for the good which however hidden it may be from earthly eyes and understanding lives jewel-like in the soul of every creature that comes into the world.

And so Violet, Countess of Thurso, died, and was laid to her long rest in the small village churchyard beyond the grounds of Sedgebrook, and after several days, in which little strength and vigour had crept into her weakened frame, Hester Trefusis announced her departure from the big, sad house. The worst of the fever had burned itself out of Thurso's brain, and hope had come in place of despair. She did not go till this hope had come; but once the sunshine of gladness shone in Allie's eyes, Hester felt the moment was at hand for her departure.

She had a longing to be gone now. Her gratitude that Thurso was spared to them was deeper and truer than any words could tell, but her endurance, both physical and mental, had come to an end. She was oppressed and saddened by the very thought of Sedgebrook, and if she would fulfil the tasks she had imposed on herself she must at once seek strength and, if possible, forgetfulness, in some place far removed from this house where sorrow and death had come in such painful guise.

They did not try to prevent her.

"It is the very best thing," Paul Warren said to his friend Crossley. "To such a mind and such a nature change is imperative now. I only regret that Miss Trefusis cannot be set apart from every influence that will serve to recall the past to her. Is it quite necessary for her to go away with Mrs. Munro Campbell as well as with her other chaperon?"

"You don't know Hester, or you would not ask such a question," Billy said, quietly. "She is one of the most noble women we shall ever meet in our lives, and this decision of hers to take care of that poor woman in her great sorrow is, perhaps, the noblest thing she has yet done. We could never make her alter her mind. We can only hope for the best, and trust to a thorough, complete change of scene and air to pull her round mentally as well as bodily. Once Thurso is quite out of the wood I shall take a run over to foreign parts and see for myself how Hester is getting on; but for the moment I can't leave him. All I can do is to help her to get away as quickly as possible, for I am sure every hour and every day she spends here is disastrous to her. I have no fear now she will ultimately be strong again, for since you have taken her in hand she is already improved, and once she is free from this place I hope she will grow again into the beautiful, healthy girl she used to be."

Billy paused a moment.

"It was a near squeak with her, I suppose, Paul?" he asked then, in a low voice, and Warren nodded his head.

"Had she not possessed such a splendid constitution she must have died long before I even saw her. Good heavens, Bill! When I realise her goodness and remember the cruel way in which her life was—"

"Hush!" Crossley said, gently. "You could never feel more keenly on this subject than I have done; but she has willed that it shall not only be forgotten but forgiven. Indeed, when I think of that poor creature lying in the grave her own folly and wickedness dug for her I am glad, too, to forget, though even death itself cannot make me quite forgive; but, then, I am not Hester Trefusis, so, consequently, I am not an angel. Come along. We will go and hasten her departure, and I want you to give my little love a tonic. She is threatening to make herself ill with her rejoicing over Thurso's improvement, and altogether she wants a lot of care, and I

mean that she shall have it, as my wife, as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXXVIII, AND LAST.

THE London season was once again in full swing. The soft balmy June air wafted the sunshine into every corner and cranny; it even seemed to find a way into the hearts of most of the mass of people who thronged the streets and parks—walking, driving, or riding in the glorious morning that had a separate beauty and sweetness in its every minute.

Before a smart little house in one of the streets out of Park-lane a carriage was waiting this June morning. It was a very dainty carriage with a pair of beautiful horses and irreproachable appointments.

Just as the door of the house opened, and the owner of the carriage came fluttering out on the step radiant in some soft summer raiment, a gentleman on horseback trotted up, and throwing his rein to the groom slipped from the saddle and came hurriedly forward.

"Oh! Dick, how you startled me. When did you come to town? Billy told me he did not expect you till Saturday. Dear old Dick, how well you are looking, and so handsome. I must kiss you! Oh! I know it is a dreadful thing to do, but I have not seen you for four whole days, and I love you so much; and besides, the neighbours are quite used to my eccentric conduct by this time." Lady Alice Crossley added, laughingly. "Billy says I am better than a punch and judy show. Of course you are coming in, you would not dare to turn away without kissing your god-son." Chatting merrily, Lady Alice slipped her arm in her brother's, and turned indoors again. "You will see him in all his glory this morning, for he is going out with his mother; and nurse considers he must wear everything most magnificent in his wardrobe on such an occasion; he is so splendidly well, Dick!"

Lord Thurso laughed.

"Is it possible by any means that he has grown any fatter, Allie. He was a most phenomenal weight. The last time I held him, my arms ached for hours!"

Allie pinched him.

"How dare you!" she cried. "Come in here and I will ring for nurse at once. She ought to have been ready ages ago, but, you know, I don't dare give orders. I am not mistress of the nursery, whatever I may be of the rest of the house. Perhaps I had better go myself, Dick. I shan't be a moment."

Allie flitted away a very girlish-looking matron despite her three years of marriage and her two-year-old son and heir, and Thurso turned into the pretty drawing-room, smiling fondly after her as he went.

The smile died as he was alone, and then one could see how much older and graver he was, and how the last three years had changed him.

He had lost his bright, boyish air, his face was thin and most thoughtful, his hair was thickly sprinkled with white. He looked ten years older than he really was.

He put down his hat and riding stick and walked about the room. There was always something new to find and something interesting too. To-day he quickly made two discoveries in the shape of two new photographs.

One was a large one, the picture of a woman most superbly beautiful, standing in a half regal fashion, wearing a court gown, with a diadem above her brow, and a nosegay of lilies in her hand.

Her face was unsmiling, yet there was a look of tenderness of life, of love in her most magnificent eyes. It was signed below in a strong handwriting simply with one word, "Hes'er."

The man stood looking into the pictured face till a mist came over his eyes, and he had to turn away.

"My love! my love!" was the cry that escaped his heart. "My love always, Hester, and yet never a love for me!"

He was bending over the second photograph when his sister came.

"Isn't it sweet!" Allie exclaimed. "Miss Graham looks so natural there, and Hester at her very best. Everyone admires the court picture the most, but this is my favourite. What a beautiful woman Hester is to be sure—last night at Grosvenor House I assure you she created a perfect furor, her uncle General Trefusis is quite mad about her—and Mr. Chetwynde is radiant—he always prophesied that she would get on more than well with her father's family!"

"She is the most beautiful woman in the world!" Thurso said, but his voice was very cold, as it always was when he spoke of Hester Trefusis. Lady Alice had long ago remarked on this fact to her husband, but Mr. Crossley had never attached much importance to the matter.

"Give 'em time—give 'em time," was all he said in a rather enigmatical sort of way; but then it must be remembered that he was in possession of a secret which his little wife had never guessed or imagined. To himself Mr. Crossley had indeed imagined in some misgiving.

"What is wrong with them? That they love one another I will stake my existence, and if ever two people were made for one another surely those two are Hester and Dick. Is it the shadow of the past that stands between them? I hope most sincerely not—they have nothing in that past with which to reproach themselves, and it would be sinful thing if that poor dead creature, who worked them both so much misery and harm should come now like a barrier in the way of their happiness.

"I don't understand them. I wish I could speak to them, but hang it all I don't like. Of course all that time when Hester was abroad looking after that poor stepmother of hers there was not much hope or much chance of their coming together—but now that she is here, ever since she came to town in the winter, and has been about with her father's people, I did expect to see something come of it all; but I'm dashed if they don't seem farther apart than ever. I would give half I possess and more too to see those two people happy; it does not seem as if it were right or just that my little one and I should be so jolly when Hester and Dick are in the cold. However," was Mr. Crossley's final and philosophical thought, "meddling won't do any good, we must just wait and hope as hard as we can that things will come right in the end!"

And so matters were on this glorious June morning, when Thurso stood in his sister's room looking with eyes of love and despair on the pictured face of the woman who was so dear to him, and yet who stood aloof from him so coldly and so determinedly.

He brushed the tears from his eyes and the sorrow from his heart as the door opened to admit the boy who was his sister's pride and delight, and was really a most splendid specimen of healthy childhood.

"I suppose I must not kiss him or I shall spoil all this!" he declared, laughingly, as he sat down and enticed the child to him.

"He is very grand, I must say," Lady Alice declared; "but for once I don't mind as he is going for a drive with his aunt Hester, and the grandest is not good enough for her."

Thurso bent and touched the boy's laughing lips, his heart thrilled as he remembered whose lips would gather the kiss he pressed there. He was very fond of the child—there were moments when he felt that had such a little creature as this been sent to him in his sadness and wasted life he would have found a happiness not to be put into words. The child on his part had a great affection for his uncle Dick; they were great friends.

He now exhibited with great pride a big silver whistle that hung round his neck.

"Auntie 'ester give 'e me," he cooed. His mother had flown off once more, and was conversing with the nurse outside. Thurso took up the whistle—there were some words printed on it. "For my boy Dick," he read.

The big Dick's face glowed with a sudden colour.

"You love your Aunt Hester, boy?" he asked, hurriedly.



CROSSLEY KNELT DOWN BESIDE THE HUDDLED MASS THAT LAY SO VERY STILL!

"Ees," nodded the child, "and 'oo uncle 'ick
—'oo ove her!"

"Ah! how much! how much!" The man's whole heart was in the whisper—he bent down to the boy's solemn face. "Listen little one—you must give Aunt Hester a message from me—will you remember it Dick? it is very important. You must kiss your dear Aunt Hester, and you must say to her these words, 'Uncle Dick loves you, Aunt Hester, loves you better than his life, better than all the world!' Can you say it, boy, dear, let me hear you—repeat it after me once again."

With lisping earnestness the boy obeyed, and when Lady Alice came fluttering in the lesson was perfect.

"Now we must go—or Hester will think we are late," she cried, and then she paused. "I—I suppose you will not come too Dick, dear?"

He shook his head.

"No—I must write some letters, and your room looks so cool and fresh I think I will write them here. Send my horse away, Allie, I will walk round it will do me good."

"But you will come with us. There will only be Hester. You don't mind her, do you?"

"Mind her!" when all his soul and body was yearning for her.

"It is not to me you should say that, Allie," he answered in a low voice, speaking out his heart almost involuntarily. "Don't you see; have you not noticed how Hester avoids me?"

Lady Alice had remarked on this, and could say nothing.

"I don't understand it," she faltered; "but," she paused, "but I am sure there is some mistake. Hester is so sweet."

"To me she shows no sweetness," was the answer given almost bitterly. Then Thurso laughed, "but you must go—it is ever so late, and I must write, I will see you sometime to-day, if I don't stay to lunch. Good-bye, boy—kiss me again," and under his breath, "and don't forget the message to Aunt Hester."

The child looked up with an air of great importance, as though he fully understood the

weightiness of the part he had to play, and then the door was shut, and Thurso was left alone in the pretty flower-scented room.

They were driving in the park, when Allie suddenly spoke the thought of her heart.

"Hester—promise to forgive me—if I ask you one thing—it—it concerns my happiness, or I should not speak it. You know me well enough to believe that."

Hester's pale face grew slightly rosy.

"Dear Allie, I could never have anything to forgive with you."

Lady Alice paused.

"It is about Dick," she said, simply. "I want to see you friends with him, and you are so cold, so do you know I believe you two have never even clasped hands since you met at Christmas-time."

Hester turned her face away. Her lips were trembling. She could not speak for a moment.

"Since you have broken the silence, Allie," she said, when speech would come, "I—will confess—I have been a little hurt by Lord Thurso's manner. He—he has seemed to avoid me to—wishes not to—"

Allie broke into a sudden, joyous laugh.

"Why, these are his very words to me not half an hour ago. Oh! you silly children. What can have put such ideas into your heads, I wonder, and—"

And here master boy, having contained himself and caused some little speculation as to the reason of his unusual silence and gravity, broke out into declamation at the top of his shrill, clear baby voice.

They could not understand him at first, but after a while his broken words were absolutely clear.

Hester sat with her hands clasped in her lap. Tears rolled down her face.

"Oh, Allie! If I have misunderstood him all this time! How shall I forgive myself? He—he is so dear to me. I have loved him from the very first. I loved him all through that dark,

terrible time, and I have been ashamed because of my love and because lately he has seemed to rebuke me. I have felt he has guessed my secret and turned from—I have told myself his heart was buried in that grave—I—"

Lady Alice bent forward and gave a command to the coachman. It was just one word—"Home."

To Hester she spoke tenderly.

"Your fears and doubts and misunderstandings are at an end now, thank Heaven for ever. I am going to take you home, Hester. All the world is looking at you, and you will be more comfortable indoors."

They sat in silence hand clasping hand till the house was reached; then Allie paused only a moment and looked into her friend's eyes.

"Dick is there," she said, simply, and Hester's face glowed like a beautiful flower.

She slipped from the carriage, scarcely heeding that it immediately drove away with its mistress and the baby master.

She went up the stairs slowly. Her heart beat in her throat. At the door she paused. She was trembling all over.

She stood looking at him an instant in silence. He was not writing; he was sitting looking at her picture.

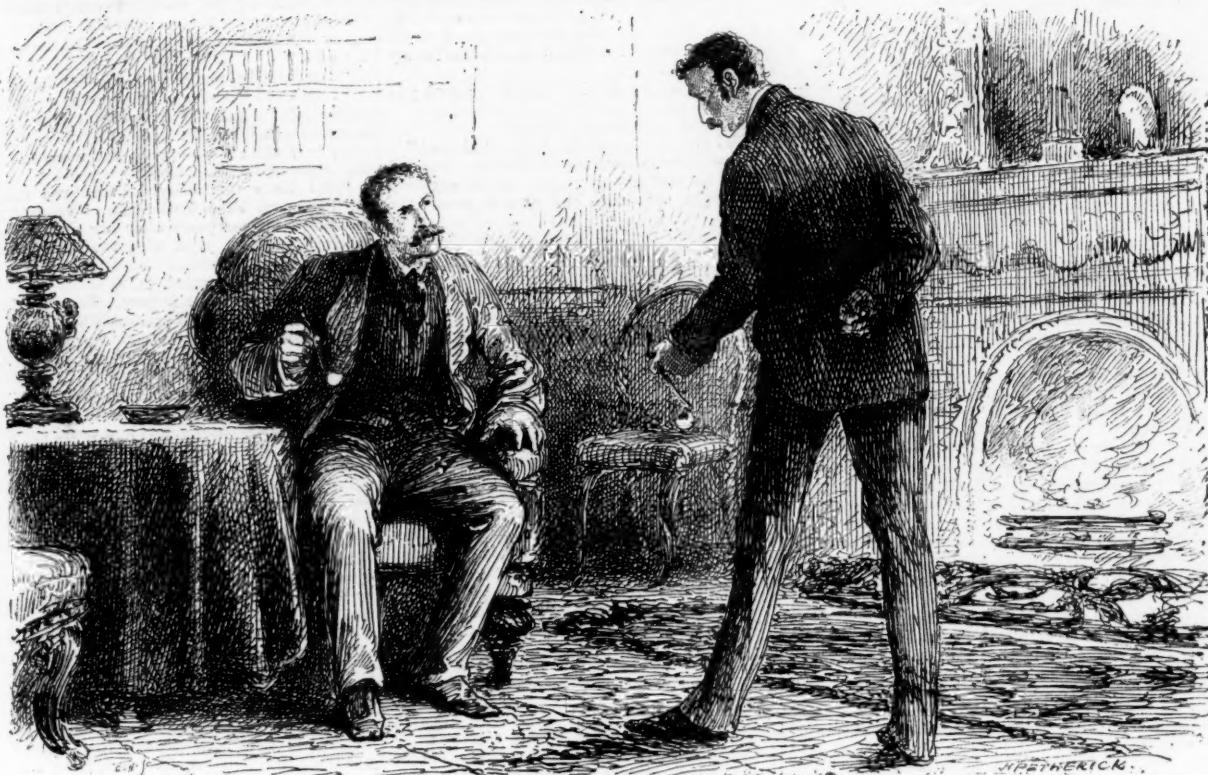
At the sound of her voice, low and broken, he sprang to his feet.

"Dick," she said, and she stretched out her hands. "I—I am come to thank you for—for your message, and—"

But the rest was whispered to him alone as he clasped her with a cry of joy in his arms.

[THE END.]

THE cat is called kat in Danish and Dutch, katt in Swedish, chat in French, katti or katze in German, catus in Latin, gatto in Italian, gato in Portuguese and Spanish, kot in Polish, kots in Russian, cath in Welsh, kath in Cornish, catus in Basque, and gaz or kats in Armenian.



"I MUST SPEAK TO SOMEONE OR I SHALL GO MAD!" SAID MARCH, PACING THE ROOM WITH FEVERISH STRIDES.

A TERRIBLE PROMISE.

—:—

CHAPTER XIII.

JORDAN and his wife proved worthy of the trust reposed in them. Not one of the Castle servants, not one of the Chatterley visitors even suspected the true nature of the Earl's illness.

Kenneth Ford called to inquire for his cousin every day, but he never asked to see him; and when Gertrude refused to leave the house on account of her husband's health he told her plainly he thought she was mistaken.

"Bardon has known Reginald nearly all his life. I believe he was just 'qualified' when my cousin entered this vale of tears. Don't you think you might trust his verdict and believe him when he tells you there is no danger?"

"I should like to go to the Lane House. It is weeks since I have really seen Aunt Edith; but supposing Reginald should want me?"

"He won't," said Kenneth, abruptly.

"I feel as though you were keeping something back," she said, anxiously.

"Look here," said poor Kenneth, fairly baffled; "the illness is more of the mind than the body. Chatterley's recovery depends entirely on his obeying the old doctor exactly. Mrs. Jordan was his nurse, and had still some control over him. I don't believe you have any."

"Not a scrap," she confessed.

"Very well, then, you must leave him to Jordan till he's better, or he'll have a relapse, and you'll be laid up. In less than a week he'll be as right as a trivet, and then you can go off to foreign parts. Phil is thinking herself dreadfully aggrieved because she hasn't seen you for two days."

"I'll walk back with you," said Gertrude; "but I can't stay long, or it will be dark."

"You'd better stay to dinner, and I'll walk home with you afterwards. The change will do you good. You look as if you had been trying to starve yourself."

She put on her hat and cloak, and they started.

Kenneth felt thankful her suspicions had never guessed what really ailed Reginald.

Mr. Ford was as indignant with Lord Chatterley as one man could be with another. He would have liked to cut his cousin in future, but as that would have involved cutting Gertrude and little Phillis also, he could not proceed to such extreme lengths; but he meant to see as little of the Earl as possible.

"Do you know," said the Countess, as they passed the gate of Copsleigh Chase, "though Mr. March has been here over a month I have never seen him?"

"Not at church?"

"The Copsleigh pew is so far from ours I can just count the heads in it, that's all. He must go into church very early for he never comes after us, and Reginald is as punctual as a clock."

"Well, March is a very good fellow," said Kenneth Ford; "he and Phillis are great friends. I told her yesterday I was getting quite jealous."

"Is it true that he is very rich?"

"I believe so. I met Verity when I was in town last, and he told me Mr. March had 'made a pile.' You know Verity's sister is to be the new vicaress of Chatterley?"

"Yes. She was only a baby when I knew them. Her brother and I were great friends."

"Meaning Paul?"

"Yes. He was only seventeen when I went abroad with Cecil, but he always struck me as so intensely true. His name, Verity, just suited him."

"He'll be coming down soon to visit the bridal pair, and you'll be able to renew your acquaintance."

Gertrude shook her head.

"Oh, no. Paul Verity belongs to my girlish days. We should have nothing in common now."

"How old are you?" asked Kenneth Ford. "You always speak of yourself as though you were a kind of feminine Methuselah."

"I am nearly thirty."

"And I am thirty-nine. Yet I don't feel too old to have things in common with Paul Verity."

"You are different. I feel quite an old woman."

"You ought to talk to March. He told us yesterday he felt quite an old man."

"And is he old?"

"I couldn't tell you. The first time I met him I put him down at fifty; but, really, when he smiles and gets interested in what he's saying, he'd pass for thirty-five. I wouldn't undertake to tell his age within ten years."

"I should like to see him."

"If only you had honoured us yesterday you would have met. I fear the fates won't bring him to the Lane House two nights running."

Aunt Edith welcomed Gertrude very tenderly. Kenneth—to relieve his feelings—had told his mother of his talk with Dr. Bardon, and the gentle widow was as angry with her nephew as her son himself."

"When you go away, Gertrude, remember you must leave us Phil," said Lady Edith, when she was alone with the Countess after dinner. "My accomplishments are rather rusty; but I will do my best to keep up her lessons. I wish Chatterley boasted a visiting governess; but there is not such a thing in the place."

"Except Miss Hoskins; and I confess I should not like her to teach Phil."

"She and Kenneth are mortal foes, so she is not likely to come here. I think it was a great mistake for her ever to be engaged as organist."

"She is a protégée of Mr. Jones, isn't she?"

"I always fancy she is a cousin of Mrs. Jones," said Lady Edith, "and that she has money, and came here hoping her relation's position as wife of the curate in charge would get her into society."

"Miss Hoskins in society!" Gertrude smiled at the idea. "Why, she would not know how to behave!"

"The Joneses have tried very hard to push her in; but you see very few people visited them, so they couldn't do much for her. She taught their children music gratis, and I believe played the organ for much less than Mr. Jones charged

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Dr. Arthur as her salary, and, in return, they gave her social advantages."

"I hope Mr. Jones means to take her with him. He leaves next week, I believe?"

"Yes, but Miss Hoskins remains. She can only be dismissed by a month's notice. I wish she would resign; but as Jem Cartwright has engaged a curate she will probably stay and see if he is to be had!"

"To be what?"

"To be married! My dear Gertrude, you are the only person in the place who does not know that Miss Hoskins' sole ambition is a gentleman husband!"

"Poor man!"

"The curate is her last hope. She tried for Dr. Bardon, though the dear old man is seventy. She had an attempt at Mr. March, while as for my Kenneth, the first three months after he came home from India she made his life a burden with her attentions."

"And now they are mortal foes."

"Miss Hoskins detests all men who do not respond to her attentions," replied Lady Edith, quietly.

"But how can she expect? I mean—"

"My dear," said her kind old aunt, "you are too sensitive, and you don't know the world. Miss Hoskins is a dashing, handsome woman, and she fancies a gentleman for a husband. To get one is her object in life, and she schemes accordingly."

"But Mr. Ford must have seen through her manoeuvres?"

"Kenneth never mentioned them to me. He makes no secret of his dislike to Miss Hoskins, but never even to me has he dropped a word of his reason for it."

Lady Chatterley was sitting by the fire. She held a screen before her face to shield it from the glow, so Lady Edith could not see her expression as she said,—

"Reginald admires Miss Hoskins. He says she rides beautifully. Some farmer once lent her a mount, and she followed the hounds."

"Just like her. Well, we won't talk of her any more, or I shall get uncharitable. I have often wished Kenneth would marry; but I would rather he kept single to his dying day than give me a daughter-in-law like that."

"I wonder Mr. Ford does not marry. I suppose it is because he has you!"

Lady Edith shook her head.

"I don't believe Ken has ever in his life been in love, and he will never marry a woman he does not care for with all his heart. You would hardly believe, Gertrude, the romantic chivalrous nature hidden beneath my boy's calm, grave, manner."

The Countess answered nothing. She was thinking, since Mr. Ford believed so intensely in love, how bitterly he would have condemned her union with her husband, for whom she had not felt one grain of affection.

They started at ten to walk back to the Castle, Gertrude and her escort. For a few minutes both were unusually silent; then Mr. Ford asked cheerfully,

"When do you expect to get away?"

"Dr. Bardon hopes Reginald will be able to travel by Monday. I am to see him on Saturday, if he goes on improving."

"Bardon tells me he has advised Chatterley to take Jordan. I would encourage the idea if I were you."

"Jordan! Why, Mr. Ford, I would as soon fancy Chatterley village without the Castle as the Castle without Jordan. The old man has never been out of England in his life; he would be quite lost on a continental tour."

"Take him, if Chatterley will agree," said Kenneth. "Believe me it is best. What would you do if your husband had another of these attacks, at a strange place? A foreign hotel for example."

"Mr. Ford," her voice did not falter, "it is only a few days ago that you laughed at me for asking if there was insanity in my husband's family; have you changed your mind?"

"Lady Chatterley!"

"Please don't think I meant to disobey the doctor or you; but the first night of Chatterley's

illness I could not sleep, and I went downstairs to ask how he was. The door of the study was locked, but I could hear him raving. I could hear sounds of awful laughter which made my blood run cold."

"I am very sorry. I would have saved you this at any cost."

She clung to his arm for support.

"Tell me," she pleaded. "Is it madness?"

For once in his life Kenneth Ford was tempted to tell lie, and answer, "Yes." Better anything he thought than that she should know the truth.

"Please tell me," faltered Gertrude; "I must know for Phil's sake."

"Phil!"

"Insanity is hereditary. She may fall under its curse."

Kenneth took the thin, gloved-hand in his.

"Gertrude," he said, gently, "have no fear for Phyllis. Chatterley's illness is not madness."

Something in his tone must have told her the truth. She asked no question, but she said, brokenly—

"I can thank God now my boy was taken. Little Phyllis is not likely to inherit such a vice."

"You may have years without such another outbreak," said Kenneth, hurriedly. "Gertrude, believe me; I had no idea of this the other day."

"I believe you," she said, simply. "You have been very kind. Don't mind my having made you tell me. It was better for me to know; it explains so much."

She said not another word until they were at the entrance to her husband's house; then she let her hand rest in Kenneth's firm clasp and uttered her "good night" as sweetly as though he had not just struck another weapon into her aching heart.

Back through the public footway Kenneth walked slowly home. He did not want to reach the Lane House until his mother had retired for the night. He was in no mood for conversation even with her. He was conscious of a slight annoyance, when a figure came towards him from under the thick trees, and Mr. March's voice said, cordially—

"Well met! I want you to come in and smoke a pipe with me."

"I think it's too late."

"Don't refuse me," pleaded the other. "You know what a lonely fellow I am, and I have a special reason for wanting your company to-night."

"I'll come, but I warn you I'm not in a cheerful mood; I seem to have a fit of the blues to-night."

"That was Lady Chatterley you were walking with just now?"

"Yes; did you see us?"

"I watched you pass by."

"The Countess was saying to-night she had never seen you."

"I don't suppose she would care to," said March, bitterly. "She is a great lady. What have I in common with her?"

"When people live in the same small village they take an interest in each other," remarked Kenneth Ford.

They were at Copsleigh, when Mr. March opened the door with his latchkey and ushered his guest into his own sanctum—a good-sized room bright with fire and lamplight.

They sat down and pipes were lighted; but Kenneth's quick eyes soon saw that his host was not at ease. March moved about restlessly. At last he began to pace the room with feverish strides.

"I must speak to someone or I shall go mad. Mr. Ford, will you keep my secret and advise me?"

"I'll do my best," said Kenneth, "but I won't believe you want advice from me."

"I do—there's no one else I could ask for it. Is Lady Chatterley a happy woman?"

Kenneth Ford started. Very proud and haughty he looked as he said, coldly—

"I am not in the habit of discussing the ladies of my family with strangers."

"Don't be hard on me. I was not a stranger to her once. She may never have spoken of me here, but there was a time when she loved me

better than all the world. I didn't know it then, but I found it out afterwards. She loved me so well that she sold herself to Chatterley for my sake."

"You can't be, you are not—her brother!"

"I am Cecil Monckton. I have come to Northshire solely to find out if my sister is a happy woman; whether riches and rank fell upon her life; or if there is a corner in her heart still for her scapgegrace brother Cecil."

"But Lady Chatterley believes you dead," cried Kenneth Ford, bewildered. "She told me herself that three years after her marriage she received a foreign paper with the news of your death."

Cecil Monckton started.

"It must have been a forgery. Stay, now I see it all. Gertrude fretted over my illness, and her husband, weary of her laments, sent that notice to the paper that he might kill for ever all his wife's hopes of my return."

"Wait a moment before you condemn him," said Kenneth. "I'm not particularly fond of Lord Chatterley myself, but how could any man in England get an advertisement inserted in a colonial paper?"

"Why, it's the easiest thing out. Have you never seen the words 'colonial papers' please copy after some notice in the *Times*? He'd only have to insert the announcement of my death first in some English paper and then send a copy to the publisher of the colonial journal, or a postal remittance, and then his paragraph would do equally well."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Kenneth, passionately, "that Lord Chatterley, knowing his wife's love for you, deliberately forged a lie which he must have known would break her heart?"

"Well, he might have thought any certainty was better than suspense, and that, as nothing had been heard of me for years, most likely I was as dead as he wished me."

"I can't make out your not writing with a sister like that."

"It was the Earl's doing, he told me he'd not have his wife troubled with begging letters, and that unless I got on he'd rather they heard nothing more of me."

"The cur!"

"I am proud in my own way, and I retorted with an oath, I'd never write to either of them, unless I was a rich man. The day after I landed this last August I was lunching in a city restaurant and I heard Mr. Hurst and a friend discussing Lord Chatterley. Hurst said the Countess was the loveliest woman in Northshire, and the most miserable; after that my mind was made up, I'd come down here in disguise and see for myself how things were."

"Lady Chatterley has never seen you?"

"Never! if she remembered the old days, she would know me in spite of the change ten years has made, and I did not want to meet her until I knew the truth."

Kenneth looked at Cecil anxiously. For Gertrude's sake he was thankful the prodigal had returned; but—if Monckton knew the exact state of things at the Castle there would be a terrible scandal.

"I can trust you," said Cecil, frankly; "advise me. Shall I reveal myself to my sister, or let her start on this foreign tour without a suspicion her brother is alive?"

"You must tell her," said Kenneth quickly; "it will be the best news she could have, but it possible keep her husband's share in the announcement of your death secret."

"You think she cares for him enough to grieve over it?"

Mr. Ford kept silent.

"I am a rich man now," said the returned exile, slowly. "Nothing compares to Lord Chatterley, perhaps, but still I have ten thousand a year, and that would be sufficient to give Gertrude and the little one every comfort, if she would leave her husband and cast in her lot with me."

"She would never do that."

"I could go away from here and make a home for her where she was not known; the child loves me already. I believe I could make them both

happy ; she can't care for Chatterley, for it is common talk that she is the most miserable woman in Northshire, and that her husband positively hates his only child."

Kenneth put one hand on Cecil's shoulder, in almost brotherly affection.

" Old fellow," he said, simply, " don't you see the child's difficulty. Lady Chatterley can't leave her husband, because the law would give him the power to keep her little girl. I believe my cousin well-nigh hates poor Phyllis, but depend upon it, he would claim her custody as a right, just because he knows where she is her mother will stay."

" Then what is to be done ? it seems useless my having made this fortune and come home."

" It's not useless, your return will give Lady Chatterley the greatest joy she has known for years ; she will feel she has a friend and protector near at hand, and that there is someone else to care for Phyllis."

" Shall I discover myself, or will you break the truth to Gertrude ? For one reason I would gladly remain unknown to the little world of Chatterley."

" Why ?"

" Because I have had the misfortune to offend my noble brother-in-law. He is so indignant because I paid for that poor girl's burial and offered a reward for the discovery of her murderer that he has been trying to hunt me out of the place."

" Never !"

" Fact. He wrote to Hurst and said it was most repugnant to his feelings to have a stranger residing so near the Castle, and that he would pay an amount equal to the rent Mr. Hurst received from me if he would give me notice at once."

" Well," said Ford, quietly, " Hurst is a gentleman, so I am sure he refused."

" He told Lord Chatterley I had paid the rent in advance till the end of March, and that therefore it was not in his power to disturb me, and he sent me a very friendly note, telling me of his landlord's manoeuvres, and warning me the Earl was capable of trying to effect by foul means what he had failed to do by fair."

" Not fair—I don't see what Chatterley can do."

" Neither do I. He might ostracise me, only he's not popular enough for his influence to have much power ; he can't turn me out, for if he forbade his tenants to supply me with things, I could get all I want from Wilmington ; but for Gertrude his hostility would only amuse me ; but as it is I feel it might be wiser not to reveal myself yet awhile as Cecil Monkton."

" I will tell her ; she shall see you once before he takes her abroad. I say, March, I'd rather go on calling you March, or I shall make a slip some day, and say Monkton before other people.—I suppose I may tell my mother ! She's a famous hand at keeping a secret."

" Certainly."

" And," Kenneth spoke with great hesitation now, as though he hardly knew how his words would be received, " I should like us two to be friends. I may be Chatterley's cousin, but I've been about as indignant with him as you could be yourself."

Cecil Monkton clasped his hand warmly, and so the two men commenced a friendship that was to last their lives.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was the last week in November when Mr. Cartwright brought his wife home to Chatterley. They drove from Salton in their own pony carriage, and reached the Vicarage about eight on a Tuesday evening, having selected that day in order to have time to turn round before Sunday came.

Two maids, and a man for the garden and pony comprised the modest establishment. Dorcas, the staid parlour-maid, had lived with Mrs. Verity for some years, and therefore was an old friend to Monica.

Everything was quite ready for their reception, and after a very cosy supper they adjourned to

the drawing-room, whither Dorcas followed them with a very serious face.

" I beg your pardon, sir, but there's been a Miss Hoskins calling here regular every day to know when you'd be home. I told her I'd send her word when you were expected, but that didn't satisfy her ; she's always in and out, and Mr. Oliver told me, sir, he didn't think that you'd better be as short with her as I could."

Mr. Oliver was Jim's curate, a very sensible, plain-spoken young man, engaged to one of Monica's dearest friends, and an old friend of the Verity family.

The Vicar looked thoughtful.

" Will she be here to-morrow, Dorcas ?"

" Certain, sir. I told her you'd be home to-night, but too late to see anyone, and she said she'd be round to-morrow at tea."

" Look here, Dorcas, send round to Mr. Oliver and say we shall think it a favour if he'll come here to breakfast with us at half-past eight to-morrow."

Monica looked up at her husband with a smile.

" I'm so glad. Mr. Oliver will tell you the truth about Miss Hoskins. I thought, from Mr. Ford's letter, she was quite a common person, but Dorcas says she almost lived at the Vicarage in Mrs. Jones' time."

The curate put in his appearance promptly, congratulated his friends on their return, but shook his head with a comical dismay when they mentioned Miss Hoskins.

" She's simply furious because you accepted her resignation, Mr. Cartwright. She's plenty of money, but she's trying to get into society, and I believe she thought playing the organ a stepping-stone."

" Well, I have engaged her successor," said Jim, " so I hope she'll depart when her month's notice is up."

" Not she. She's got a pretty little house here, and lives on her means. Mrs. Cartwright, let me implore you to be cautious," said the curate, laughing. " Miss Hoskins tells everyone she means to be a sister to you ! I only hope Miss Charles is not easily dismayed, for her predecessor is already vowed vengeance on her."

" And how are things going in the parish generally ?" inquired Jim.

" The Chatterleys are still away. Their little girl is staying at the Lane House, and the Castle is full of workpeople. Mr. March, of Copsey, is willing to pay half the organist's salary if there's any difficulty. I fancy," with a broad smile, " Miss Hoskins wished to be—well, not a sister to him, and that he regards her resignation as a personal benefit. People have been very pleasant to me ; in fact, if you ask me I should say there was only one crumpled rose leaf."

" Miss Hoskins is in the study, sir," said Dorcas at that moment. The curate looked at Monica and smiled.

" Half-past nine. She has lost no time."

Jim turned to his wife.

" I shall take it purely as a call on parochial business, Monica, and tell her you never see visitors in the morning."

Poor Mr. Cartwright ! A very showy, good-looking woman of thirty greeted him with effusion, addressing him as " dear Vicar," and assuring him she knew things would be put right now he had come to live among them.

" But I am not aware that they are wrong," said Jim, cheerfully.

" I never meant to resign the organ, my one labour of love, only Mr. Oliver and Mr. Ford were so harsh and ungentlemanly."

Mr. Cartwright grew grave.

" I have known them both for years, and I don't believe either of them could be ungentlemanly, madam," said the Vicar, quietly. " You resigned the post of organist at your own free will, and Mr. Ford, in my name, accepted your resignation, there the matter is at an end."

" But I am willing to remain, I——"

" I filled the vacancy at once. Hearing of a suitable candidate I engaged her, and she will enter on her duties as soon as your month's notice expires !"

" She can't live on thirty pounds a-year,"

snapped Miss Hoskins. " I had private means to eke out the miserable stipend."

The Vicar rose to intimate the interview was at an end.

" If that is your opinion of the salary offered I feel sure it is a good thing, Miss Hoskins, that you resigned the post."

Miss Hoskins glared at him, and did not rise.

" I should be glad to make Mrs. Cartwright's acquaintance," she said, coolly. " I was a great comfort to Mrs. Jones. The Chatterleys and the Fords are so absurdly stuck-up that she depended chiefly on me for society."

" I am sorry that my wife is not ready at present to receive visitors."

A less forbearing man than the vicar might have added that Kenneth Ford was his intimate friend, and Lady Edith had offered almost motherly kindness to his bride. It was an extreme relief to him when he got rid of Miss Hoskins ; but there was a pucker on his brow when he went back to Monica and the curate.

" Well ?" asked Mr. Oliver, smiling.

" She is awful," confessed Jim, heartily. " My dear fellow I pity you !"

Lady Edith came over in the afternoon, bringing with her Phyllis Thorn. The little girl took a great fancy to Monica, but the young wife tried in vain to trace any likeness in her to the Gertrude Monkton of her childish days.

" You are not like your mother, Lady Phyllis," she said, frankly.

" No ; so everyone says," returned Phil ; " but mother doesn't mind. She's coming home a month to-day, Mrs. Cartwright. She's been gone such a time !"

The Vicar and his wife dined at the Lane House the following week. There was only Mr. March to meet them, and so, perhaps, it was natural the conversation should turn on parish matters and the appointment of the new organist. The little cottage close to the church had been prepared for her, Lady Edith giving a good deal of the furniture from the stores of the Lane House.

" The only thing I fear," said Kenneth, " is Miss Charles being dull. It seems such a tremendous change from Paris to a Northshire village."

" I don't think she will mind that," said Monica ; " she has lately lost the grandmother who brought her up, and her one desire seems a quiet English home."

" She is English, I suppose ?" asked Lady Edith. " The name might be French."

" She is three parts English. Her father was our countryman, and her mother was English on one side though she had a French father. Monica took a great fancy to her," said the Vicar. " I am afraid she is too beautiful for us to keep her long. She has the loveliest face I ever saw."

" And the saddest," put in his wife.

" Really you make me feel curious," said Lady Edith. " I shall certainly call on your paragon and bid her welcome to Northshire."

" You won't find her pushing or intrusive like Miss Hoskins," said the Vicar, " Beatrice Charles is a great contrast to her predecessor, I can assure you."

The wedding pair left early, and Mr. March did not linger long after them. Lady Edith seemed lost in thought.

" What are you dreaming about, mother mine, the perfections of Jim's organist ? She will probably turn out a most ordinary individual. Jim and his wife are just in the mood to see every thing and everybody through rose-coloured spectacles."

" My dear, don't speak so scornfully. I thought their happiness the prettiest sight imaginable."

" I—I dare say," Mr. Ford sighed heavily as he spoke ; " but I am not sure, mother, that the spectacles of such felicity does not make a lonely man a trifle discontented."

" My dear Kenneth," said the old lady, gently, " it only rests with yourself to be happy too. Do you know I was wondering when you spoke whether you would lose your heart to Miss Charles ?"

" No."

"She is a lady, you know. Not like poor Miss Hoskins!"

"I daresay!"

"And Mrs. Cartwright says she is beautiful, and has a lovely voice."

"Yes."

"And you know, Kenneth, you are rich enough not to need a fortune with your wife, and romantic enough to fall in love with a penniless beauty."

"Mother, think of Reginald's feelings. Lord Chatterley would have a fit if we expected him to receive the village organist as a first cousin."

"It's no business of his. Kenneth, do you know I was actually wishing you might fall in love with Miss Charles. I am getting an old woman, dear, and I want to see your wife and children before I die."

Kenneth was looking into the fire with great intentness, almost as though he could see a story written in the flames.

"Mother," he said, suddenly; and there was a ring of sadness in his tone which went to her heart, "you must not go match-making for me. I would do a great deal to please you, but I shall never marry."

"You may meet some one you can love yet," she answered, "hard as you seem to please. I can't give up the hope yet, Ken."

"You must," he answered, gravely. "I never meant to tell you, but you had better know. I shall never marry, mother, because the only woman I ever loved is lost to me."

And Lady Edith imagined he had met and loved some charming girl in India, only to see death take her.

Little did she guess that Kenneth had come home heartbroken and fancy-free only to fall into a terrible mistake, and learn to love with every fibre of his nature the woman who wore his cousin's wedding-ring.

It was an accident. Before he knew where he was wending the mischief was done. He would guard his secret with his life—he would be Gertrude's friend and champion.

She should never suspect he kept single only because in all the world she was the one woman he would fain have married.

(To be continued.)

FICKLE FORTUNE.

—:-

CHAPTER I.

"It's so hard for working-girls to get acquainted. They never meet a rich young man, and they don't want a poor one. It seems to me that a girl who has to commence early to work for her living might just as well give up for ever all hopes of a lover and of marrying," declared Annie Best, one of the prettiest girls in the immense book-binding house, to the group of companions who were gathered about her eating their luncheon. "It's get up at daylight, swallow your breakfast, and hurry to work; and it's dark before you are out on the street again. How can we ever expect to meet a marriageable fellow? No one ever sees us? Why couldn't we all have been born ladies, I wonder?" and Annie slammed down the lid of her dianer-pout of a resounding bang and a decided pout of two of the ripest red lips that were ever seen.

"Do you know what I think, girls?" cried a shrill but very sweet young voice, from the direction of the window-ledges, adding breathlessly: "I believe if fate has any lover in store for a girl that he will be sure to just happen to come where she is, on one mission or another. That's the way that it all happens in novels. I took particular pains to notice. These people who write must know just how it is, I fancy."

A dozen pairs of astonished eyes were turned towards the slim, girlish figure sitting bolt upright on the window-sill, with the sunshine slanting through her fluffy golden curls, and falling athwart her pink-and-white baby face and wide-open, excited violet eyes; then an uproarious laugh broke from the group of girls—it was

such an unexpected quarter from which to hear an opinion.

"Well, now, who would ever have imagined that a chit of a thing like you, Mercy Wood, would have the impudence to put in your ear, or that you ever thought of lovers or marrying, and you only sixteen a day or two ago?" cried one. "It's absurd!"

"I wasn't saying anything about my ever marrying. I was just telling you what I thought about ever meeting the fellow who is intended for you—the right one—as you call it."

"What if you were in a desert?" suggested Annie, with a curl of her ripe red lip. "Surely you couldn't expect a young man would ever find a business that would bring him out there to you, could you?"

"Why not?" cried pretty little Mercy, with a gay, sweet, saucy, triumphant laugh that startled the sparrows outside. "Of course fate would send my Prince Charming even into a desert to find me," cooed Mercy. "And as to the business that would bring him—why, he could come there to capture the ostriches which are to be found only in the heart of the desert—so there! You know the old adage: 'People meet where hills and mountains don't.' I tell you there's some truth in that."

"It's a good thing to have so much assurance and hope," said Annie, with a curl of her lip. "I trust that you may find plenty of lovers in the future, though I doubt it."

"I have plenty now," declared Mercy, waltzing nimbly about the floor, as only a bright, happy, thoughtless young girl can who is free from care. "I couldn't count all who make eyes at me now, so what will it be when I get as old as the rest of you girls?"—this a trifle maliciously, for every one of them was at least twenty, and that seemed rather *passée* to this bit of femininity of sweet sixteen.

Some one noticed that the huge clock on the mantel wanted just three minutes to one, so the fragments of luncheon were crammed back into their baskets, and the girls, chatting and laughing, went back to their work, for they had a very particular foreman. But one of their number, Agnes Burton, hung back to have a word with Mercy.

"I hope that you will not grow into a flirt," she said, slipping her arm about Mercy's waist and looking into the young girl's flushed face with serious eyes, adding: "This brings me to the question that I intended asking you this noon. Where did you meet that young tram conductor who walked up as far as your home with you last night? Do tell me."

"Were you spying upon me, you mean thing?" cried Mercy Wood, blushing as fiery red as the crimson heart of a peony, and stamping angrily the tiniest of little feet; and she flung her companion's arm from her as though it had stung her.

"Can't you tell me?" pleaded Agnes, earnestly. "Remember, you have no one to warn you. You are an orphan in this great, cold world, and—and you are so young that you don't know life, and cannot realise that every young man who smiles into your eyes and says flattering things to you is not in love. When you have no relative to confide in, you ought to have a girl friend older and wiser than yourself. Let me be that friend to you, Mercy."

As she listened, the momentary anger died out of the girl's face. She could not keep angry with anybody very long, and quite before Agnes had finished her sentence a pair of plump white arms were thrown round her neck and Mercy's soft, peachy pink cheek was nestling against her own, while the sweet young voice whispered,—

"Won't you breathe it, Agnes, if I tell you the greatest secret in the whole wide world? Promise on your word and honour that you won't, and I'll tell you, and it will fairly make you hold your breath. It's just like one of those grand love stories all of us girls like to crowd around together at lunch hour and read in papers, when we pick up the special copies they throw around; only this is in real life, you know."

"I promise," returned Agnes Burton, gravely; "only I hope this isn't a ruse to turn off the

question about the young tram conductor whom I saw you with."

"Oh, no! the secret is about him," laughed Mercy, gleefully, "and it will make you open your eyes wider than they are now when you hear it; and it's so dreadfully romantic, too. You know how Annie Best has been boasting of late about the handsome new conductor on the Holloway tram, on whom she has 'made a smash,' as she phrases it. Well, the young man you saw me talking to—is the one."

"What!" gasped Agnes. "Do you mean it was Annie's beau to whom you were talking?"

"He's not her beau!" declared Mercy, flushing up really and angrily. "He don't care a snap of his finger for her. He told me so."

"He—told—you—so?" repeated Agnes Burton, too amazed at the instant to frame any other remark, while the thought flashed through her brain how deeply Annie Best loved this handsome young man, and that she was confident of a proposal of marriage from him sooner or later. She had often told Agnes as much as that of late.

"It was only last week that I first met him," Mercy went on, "and it happened in this way: I came down, just by chance, on his tram, and—I noticed that he looked at me rather admiringly, as he changed my shilling while standing beside me; and—and I noticed, too, that he leaned against me a little more than the occasion demanded, or at least I fancied so; but perhaps it was the jolting of the car."

"I took little shy peeps at him. I wanted to see what he looked like, Annie had been sounding his praises so."

"I found he was dreadfully nice, quite the handsomest young fellow I had ever seen—elegantly formed, straight as an arrow, with such a beautiful dark moustache, and laughing black eyes, and the whitest of white hands."

"When he helped me off the tram he held my hand so tightly and so long that I felt terribly embarrassed and did not know what to do or say. But, oh! he was so polite! I dropped my eyes and never looked at him as I stepped off."

"How I ever got into the other tram I never knew. A moment later the other conductor came around for my fare, and then—oh, horrors! I could not find my pocket-book. I searched frantically in every pocket. 'I must have lost my purse,' I faltered, beginning to cry, for I saw he did not believe me, and thought that I meant to beat my way, as they call it, when just at that instant, puffing and panting, up came the other conductor—the handsome fellow I had but just left.

"'You dropped your purse on the seat of my tram,' he said, raising his hat from his dark curly hair. 'Permit me to return it to you.'

"I was so overjoyed to get it that I forgot to thank him. I remembered later that I had not done so. And what do you think? That very evening he called with a book I had also left on the seat, and which I had entirely forgotten. My name and address were written on the flyleaf. Just at that moment a young man happened along who knew him, and he introduced us. I did not invite him in, but we stood and talked for an hour or more on the steps, and he asked at length for the pleasure of my company to go with him to the theatre the following evening, if my people were willing."

"I told him I had no relatives to consult, and that I'd like ever so much to go, but—but I had heard that he was Annie Best's sweetheart. Oh, Agnes, how angry he got when I said that. He flushed to the very roots of his dark hair. You ought to have seen him."

"Pardon me, but I am not!" he replied, "though I hear that she is circulating such a story, but there is no better authority on the subject than myself. I have spoken to her a few times, but it is ridiculous for a girl to presume, if a man is pleasant to her, that he wants to marry her. I cannot even say that I admire Miss Annie Best. As a rule a man like myself does not admire a girl whose acquaintance he can form through a handkerchief flirtation."

"I thought of telling Annie that, but you know what a fury she is. Why, she would almost kill me, I believe, if she once got an inkling that I knew about it."

"Well, to make a long story short, it so chanced that he happened along our street every night after that, and always found me, quite by chance, at the door, and so he stopped for a chat.

"And now comes the most wonderful part of the affair. He is no real conductor at all. I don't mean quite that, but—oh, Agnes, this is what I mean: he—he bet with a number of young gentlemen the last election and lost the wager. If he lost he was to come to London and be a tram conductor for three months, and that is what he did. He is a young lawyer in a small town near here, and has great expectations, he says."

"His time will be up to-morrow, Agnes, and then he is going back to his home, and—and I shall never see him again. He is like a prince in disguise—such as we read about. I always thought him too grand and polite to be only a tram conductor."

Agnes Burton felt greatly relieved in her heart that he was going away so soon, but she was too wise to say so to Mercy, knowing that if one attempts to break up an infatuation on the part of a girl of that age, ten to one it makes matters only worse.

"Life will never be the same to me after Leonard Horton goes, for Agnes, I—I have learned to care for him. I couldn't help myself, though I tried hard not to, and to be gay and jolly before all the girls. But, oh, Agnes, pity me! My heart is breaking. I wish I could die!"

They did not notice, as they moved on, that the door where they stood talking was partly ajar, nor did they see the girl who had paused in the entry outside almost at the very beginning of their conversation. It was Annie Best, and she had heard every word, from beginning to end, that Mercy had uttered; and even after they had passed on she stood there, cold and motionless as a statue cut in marble.

"Great heaven! this explains Leonard Horton's sudden coolness," she muttered, with a great choking sob; "but if Mercy Wood attempts to take my lover from me let her beware! this earth will not be broad enough to hold the two of us. It will be war to the very death between us, and we shall see which one of us shall win him!"

By a violent effort Annie controlled her wild grief and passed into the work-room. It was only her indomitable pride that kept her from taking her hat and cloak and going straight home and to her bed, there to weep her very heart out—ay, weep her very life out, if she could. If her lover were fickle, Annie told herself that she did not care to live and face the dull, cold world, for what is life and the world to a young girl if the lover on whom she has set her heart and her hopes prove false to her?

CHAPTER II.

FROM the moment that Annie Best heard the story of the perfidy of her lover she was a changed being.

She went wearily enough to the lodging-house she called home, and paced the floor up and down the live-long night.

"He was pleased enough with me before Mercy Wood's pink-and-white baby face came between us," she moaned, clinching her hands tightly together and bursting ever and anon into a flood of tears.

She looked around at the little stuffy room, and thought of all her girlish day-dreams—of the sweet hopes she had had of soon leaving those dingy four walls, and of having a little bower of a cottage to call "home," with a handsome young husband all her own to love her.

She had pictured every scene to herself—just how each cosy room should be furnished, and what vines and flowers should grow in the garden, and the pretty dresses she would wear, and how she would stand at the window and watch for handsome Leonard to come home each night, and what a dear, cosy life they would lead, loving each other so dearly.

And now what of those vanished day-dreams?

Ah! heaven pity her! they lay in ruins around her, and heart-wrecked, heart-broken she was facing the cold, bleak world again.

It had been by the greatest effort that she had looked in Mercy's face during the day that followed without betraying her bitter hatred of her; but as the hours crept on, and she saw Mercy's glance wander uneasily now and then towards the clock, her intense rage grew almost uncontrollable.

"She is longing for the hours to pass, so that she may join him," thought Annie, and her black eyes fairly scintillated at the thought.

Suddenly Mercy raised her curly head from her work.

"Girls!" she exclaimed, shrilly and eagerly, "have you forgotten that Monday is Bank Holiday? What are you going to do with yourselves?"

A score or more of voices answered at random that they thought that it had been decided long since that they were all going up the river on an excursion.

"I can't go on the excursion with you, girls," returned Mercy, "for I've got another engagement."

"Bring your company with you," chorused a dozen or more of the girls.

Mercy glanced up hastily and met Annie's burning eyes fixed intently upon her.

She started, turned deathly pale, and then turned defiantly away, wondering if Annie could by any means suspect that the engagement she had was to accompany handsome Leonard Horton to the matinée.

She wondered vaguely if Agnes, to whom she had confided this, had betrayed her.

The look in Annie Best's eyes as they met her startled her.

The bell which released the girls from the workroom that night had scarcely rung ere Mercy had on her jacket and sailor hat and was fairly flying down the steps and out into the street.

"I hope to goodness that I shall escape Fred to-night!" she muttered. "He cannot get out as soon as I do, and I will be almost home while he is waiting for me at the bottom of the stairs;" and a little, light, airy laugh bubbled from her red lips.

Fred, as she called him, was one of the gilders in the house—a tall, handsome, manly young fellow of four-and-twenty, whose only fancy was that he loved little Mercy Wood to distraction.

"Yes, I shall escape him, sure, to-night!" laughed Mercy again.

But the laugh died from her lips, for at that instant there was the sound of hurried footsteps behind her—footsteps she knew but too well—and the next instant Fred Worth stood beside her.

"Mercy!" he panted. "Why didn't you wait for me, little girl?"

Mercy started guiltily.

"Why, gracious! is it you, Fred?" she cried. "I certainly thought you had gone home long ago, and so I hurried away."

His handsome face brightened; the dark shadow was quickly dispelled from his earnest, brown eyes.

"Do you know, Mercy," he said, "I was half afraid that you had run away from me intentionally; and yet I could hardly bring myself to believe it, the thought gave me such a sharp pang of pain at the heart." The girl laughed a little nervously. "I wanted to talk to you about Bank Holiday," he said, earnestly; "but I fear what I have to say will grieve you, dear." "Oh, gracious goodness, that's just what I expected!" was the thought that flashed through her guilty little brain. "Mercy," he said, huskily, "I'm afraid that I will not be able to get off, although it is a legal holiday, and I had set my heart upon taking you somewhere. We have found that there is some work which must be got out, or it will mean a heavy loss to our employers. I was the only one whom they felt they could call upon to help them in their dilemma, and I could not refuse, even though a vision of your pretty, disappointed face rose up before my mind's eye. I knew you would be expecting me to take you

somewhere. Oh! Mercy, how can I make amends for it?"

To his great surprise, she laughed gaily.

"Don't trouble yourself about me, Fred," she exclaimed. "I won't mind it one bit;" and her pink-and-white face fairly dimpled over with smiles.

He opened his brown eyes wide and looked at her in surprise, remembering quite well that for many a week past Mercy had been looking forward to this holiday and calculating how she should spend it.

"But you will be so disappointed, little one," he reiterated, earnestly, and not a little puzzled by the way she took it.

Again she laughed—a little, light, airy laugh that somehow grated on his nerves.

"I was thinking," he continued, "that perhaps you would like to go somewhere with my cousin Ellen—go up the river, or to a matinée, or some place like that. I would pay all the bills, of course, and—"

"Go with your cousin Ellen?" she cut in.

"No, I guess not. It's just like you not to want me to have a good time. If you can't be there, Fred Worth, pray excuse me from going with her!"

He looked down at her with grieved eyes.

"Ellen is not as young and gay as you are, I know, dear," he said, huskily; "but, oh! if you only knew what a good, gentle soul she is, and how kind her heart is! She would go out of her way—do anything she could to give you a few hours' pleasure, because—because she knows how dear you are to me."

Mercy shrugged her shoulders and curled her pretty red lips scornfully. Ellen Smith, his quiet, sedate cousin, was four-and-twenty. No wonder that gay little Mercy did not consider her quite companionable for a day's outing.

"She would be very glad to take you to the matinée," he persisted. "Do consent to go with her, and then I will feel quite happy, for I shall feel sure that you are having a pleasant day, even if I am not with you. Otherwise, I should be so troubled, thinking of you sitting all alone in the house."

She looked up innocently into his face.

"I need not stay in the house if I do not like," she retorted. "There's a number of girls from the house going on an excursion up the river, and they have invited me."

Poor, innocent Fred! It did not occur to him then that, although she had remarked she was invited, she had not said she was going. He jumped at conclusions readily enough.

"I am so glad!" he exclaimed, joyfully. "I know if you go with a crowd of the girls the day will pass pleasantly for you. But you will not forget in the midst of all your happiness to give a thought to me, will you?" he whispered, with a world of tenderness in his voice.

"Of course not," she said, promptly.

"Especially when your eye rests upon our betrothal-ring," he added, wistfully.

Mercy blushed alarmingly red, then paled as quickly, at the mention of the ring.

The truth may as well be told here and now: Mercy, like many another silly, thoughtless young girl, had drifted into an engagement with Fred just to get the ring he wore on his finger, which she had admired with all her heart and longed to possess.

But with Mercy, possession had dimmed her appreciation for the little turquoise and pearl affair which adorned her finger, and at which handsome Leonard Horton had glanced so contemptuously only the evening before, and then down at the elegant, monogrammed diamond ring which glistened on his own white, shapely hand.

Only that very day Mercy had wished with all her heart that she could get up some excuse to break what Fred considered an engagement, and give him back his little cheap pearl and turquoise ring; but the occasion did not seem to be quite ripe, and Fred, poor fellow! had been kinder to her than ever that day.

At the corner she hesitated. It would never do to walk much further with Fred and stand a chance of meeting handsome Leonard, she told herself.

"I have a little shopping to do, and I shall have to leave you here," she said, hastily; and she made her parting very brief with Fred.

He noticed it, and a sudden fear stirred his heart. He looked after the slender figure flitting away through the slanting sunshine, with his soul in his eyes.

"She is so dear to me," he murmured. "I often think I would go mad if I were to lose her."

He walked slowly down the street, but, contrary to his usual custom, he did not turn his footsteps homeward, but proceeded aimlessly along the crowded thoroughfare.

How far he went Fred Worth never knew. Suddenly in turning a corner the first object his eyes fell upon was Mercy, and by her side a tall, handsome, dark-eyed young man whose arm was linked with hers, and they were walking along, deeply engaged in conversation, oblivious to the whole world.

He stood quite still; the heart in his bosom seemed to almost tear itself asunder with one mighty throb. Was it Mercy, or did his eyes deceive him? He quickened his pace until he stood beside them. The impulse was strong within him to seize the girl's hand and tear her from her companion. The blood surged like fire through his veins.

But before he could put his mad thought into execution the crowd on the thronged thoroughfare swept between them.

In that instant Mercy's companion called a cab and placed the girl in it. The door closed with a bang, and the next instant the vehicle was whirling down the avenue, and turning round the first corner was instantly lost to sight.

Quick as the lightning's flash Jack leaped upon a passing tram. He felt intuitively that the stranger was taking Mercy to her home. This tram would pass the door. He would confront them there, even though they had gone by another street.

By a strange fatality he had in his breast pocket a small revolver which a friend had asked him to call for that day at a shop where it was being repaired, and bring to him, as Fred would be passing that way. It was an unlucky moment for Fred, Heaven knows, when he consented to call for the fatal revolver for his friend.

As his hand touched it in his breast pocket a terrible thought flashed across his excited brain.

Ten minutes later he reached the cottage where Mercy boarded. One of the bookbinding girls was sitting on the porch as he came up.

"Why, halloo, Fred!" she cried. "What are you doing here?"

"Where's Mercy?" he interrupted, quickly. "Is she in the house yet? I want the truth. You must tell me!"

The girl looked in Fred's face, and dared not tell him all.

CHAPTER III.

AGNES BURTON—for it was she—looked at Fred Worth with troubled eyes. She knew how much he cared for Mercy, and she realised that it would never do to tell him that his fickle sweetheart had gone riding with another man. He was hot-tempered, and in jealousy there is little reason. Like the wise girl that she was, Agnes made excuses for her friend.

"No, Mercy is not here, Fred," she said, presently; "but I feel sure she would have been had she known you were coming. She has gone to spend the evening with one of the girls, who sent her lover specially to bring Mercy over, with the request that he was not to come back without her; and no doubt Mercy will pass Sunday with her."

"Which one of the girls is it?" he inquired.

"I don't really know that," said Agnes, a little faintly.

Fred Worth drew a great, long breath of relief, and the old happy smile lighted up his face in an instant.

What a foolish fellow he had been to mistrust Mercy! he told himself. But, after all, he was glad he had come and seen Agnes, and thus had the horrible doubt removed from his mind.

"Well, it does not matter so much that I did not see her. I did not want anything in particular. I am glad she will have a pleasant time this evening and to-morrow. And about your holiday: I suppose you will be going on the excursion with the rest of the girls on Monday?"

"Oh, yes!" responded Agnes, lightly but constrainedly.

He drew nearer and looked wistfully into her face.

"I cannot go, unfortunately," he said, "but I hope, Agnes, that you will see that Mercy has as good a time as the rest of the girls." He stopped a moment, and looked down confusedly, as if at a loss to know how to proceed with the rest of his sentence, but concluded at length to break right into it boldly. "If I were there I would treat all you girls to as much ice-cream as you could eat," he went on, with a laugh. "But, seeing that I am not to be one of the party, I want you to do the honours for me, Agnes, and here's the money to pay for it, with my compliments to the crowd."

And as he spoke he drew a crisp bill from his vest pocket and thrust it into her hand.

"Oh, Fred," cried the girl, "you are too good and too kind!" and she felt rather guilty as she took it, for she knew that he was giving it solely that they would make it pleasant for pretty little Mercy, and she knew that Mercy was not to be there.

Only that day she had confessed to her that she had made an engagement to go to the matinée with the handsome car conductor.

But there would be a tragedy if Fred got an inkling of this, she well knew. She had deceived him, poor fellow; but was it not for the best, under the circumstances?

Fred went to his home with a light heart, and much relieved in feelings. It was well for him that he did not know just how Mercy was passing those very moments.

When Leonard Horton had met her on the street that afternoon he had quite hoped to slip by her unnoticed. Not but what he was pleased to see her; but the girl was dressed so cheaply, and to make matters worse, she carried her little dinner-basket over her arm, and he knew that if any of his friends were to see him they would smile in derision, for they could not help knowing by the dinner-basket that his companion was a working-girl.

His pride was the one fault of his life. He felt that he was quite handsome enough to woo and win an heiress, if one chanced in his way. In fact that was what he was looking for.

It would never do to be seen walking along the streets with this pretty little working-girl, and it was for this very reason that Horton had called a cab to take her home.

"The ride is too short," he said, as they reached the house where Mercy lived, and where Agnes Burton was awaiting her. "Let us go round a few streets. I want to talk to you about the arrangements for the outing."

Nothing loath, Mercy consented, and away they whirled down the street; and it was very fortunate, too, for in less than three minutes later Fred had appeared at the door.

"I have been wondering if you really cared to go to the matinée on bank holiday," said Horton, in his low, sweet, smooth voice, which had never yet failed to capture the hearts of susceptible young girls. "I was wondering if you would not prefer a sail up the river. I understand that there is to be quite an excursion to Barnes."

The truth is he had just discovered that several of his acquaintances were to be at the matinée on that day, and he regretted that he had invited Mercy to go, realising how terribly ashamed he would be of the shabby clothes of the girl whose only recommendation was her pretty young face, and he had determined that he should take her to that matinée, at any cost.

"Why, I would just as soon go to the excursion as to the matinée," declared Mercy; "but there's one objection—all the rest of the girls in the works are going up on the boat to Barnes, and among them Annie Best."

Horton smothered back a fierce imprecation behind his silky curled moustache.

"Then we will abandon the Barnes trip," he

said, laughingly. "But we can go to Greenwich; besides, I think it will be quite as enjoyable, for now that I think of it, there will be an immense crowd there. They are to have a grand garden fête, with dancing and so forth."

"Oh, I should enjoy that more than I could tell you!" cried Mercy, clapping her hands, her blue eyes expanding wide with expectancy. "I adore dancing, and I was never at a garden-party in all my life, and I have read so much about them."

"We can remain all the afternoon and evening, have refreshments, and then come home on the steamer. It will be beautiful moonlight night, and when the band plays on the deck you will enjoy it hugely."

The girl's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed.

Soon afterward the cab stopped before Mercy's home again, and, with a shy, sweet smile, she bid her admirer "good-night," and flitted up the steps and into the hall, and directly into the arms of Agnes Burton, who was awaiting her there.

"Oh, Mercy!" she began, reproachfully, "how could you do it?"

"Do what?" cried Mercy, with a very innocent air.

"Come riding home from work with that stranger!" cried Agnes reproachfully.

The gayest laugh that ever was heard broke from Mercy's ripe red lips, and her blue eyes fairly danced.

"I did not think that you, of all other girls, would be jealous, Agnes Burton!" she declared.

"I am not jealous," responded the girl quietly, "only I pity you for your want of sense in being fascinated by a handsome stranger, when you have such a lover as honest, warm-hearted Fred Worth who fairly worships the ground you walk on. Everyone knows that—and pities him."

Mercy's red lip's curled scornfully, and she turned away on her heel.

"He is only a gilder in the works," she declared, "while the one I came home with is a grand, high-toned, wealthy young fellow, and so aristocratic. He thought nothing of bringing me home in a cab, while Fred would have fainted at the idea. He is so frightened if he spends a shilling of his hard-earned wages. It's no fun going around with a poor fellow. I hate them! So there!"

With that Agnes took the bill from her pocket, and told all that poor Fred had said about treating to the ice-cream.

Mercy looked astounded, but turned the matter off by saying,—

"It was a good thing to have him stand treat once in his lifetime, I declare!"

But, nevertheless, she felt ashamed deep down in her own heart for the way she had spoken of poor Fred. Still she would not listen to Agnes's admonition, declaring, too, that she meant to go on an excursion with Leonard Horton, even though it made an enemy of Fred for life. She was tired of him, anyhow.

"You will rue it if you go with that stranger. Trouble will come of it as sure as you live." Those were Agnes's last words to Mercy as they parted an hour later, and they rang in her brain for many and many a long day afterward; and these two girls, who had been such steadfast friends, parted from each other in coldness and in anger for the first time in their lives.

The sun rose bright and golden on the eventful morning, and Mercy was in high glee as she looked out from her curtained window, and the visions of a joyous day flitted before her.

At two o'clock Horton put in a prompt appearance, and Mercy was quite ready, and he could not help but own to himself that she looked as fair and pretty and quite as stylish as any young girl you would meet in a day's travel in her neat navy-blue merino dress, with its white duck vest and broad, white cuffs and sailor collar, and the white sailor hat, with the white silk band about it to match. And nothing could have been more dainty than her neat kid boots and gloves.

Horton raised his hat to this fair young vision of loveliness with all the gallantry he was capable of, and away they went in high spirits and high

glee, and with never a thought in Mercy's heart of poor Fred tailing at that moment in the work-room.

It was a delightful trip down the river, and when they arrived at their destination they found the place thronged with a merry group of pleasure seekers.

The hours flew by on golden wings. Dusk gathered. Night soon drew her sable curtains, and pinned them with a star.

They dined sumptuously at the hotel, and then went back to the park, which was ablaze with light and colour resounding to the merry strains of music, the babble of gay voices and joyous laughter, and the sound of feet keeping step in the dance.

Never had Mercy enjoyed herself so well. Leonard Horton was the prince of escorts. He knew how to make himself agreeable and entertaining. He whispered tender words into his companion's ears, held her little hand, and conveyed to her in a thousand different ways that this was the happiest day of his life because she was by his side.

At length the hour drew near for the people to leave the grounds, for the last boat was waiting. In twenty minutes' time she was to start back to the city.

"Have you had a pleasant time, Mercy?" asked her companion, smiling down into her pleased, flushed face.

"I have had the most pleasant hours of my life!" declared Mercy. "It has been like heaven here: I am sorry to go. And, oh! how dark and dreary to-morrow will be, after such a pleasant outing here!"

"You need not return to the works to-morrow, unless you wish," whispered Horton, still holding the girl's little hand in his.

Mercy's heart beat high. Was handsome Leonard Horton about to propose to her? She wondered.

But no! the words she was waiting for did not fall from his lips, although he had plenty of opportunity as they walked down the path that led to the pier.

"Perhaps he means to wait until he gets on the boat," she thought, with a fluttering heart.

Poor little Mercy! there was no one to warn her against him. How was she to realise that the thought of marriage had never entered his head, and that he was of the kind who smile on and flatter women and then ride away, little caring how many broken hearts are left behind?

Mercy's pretty, innocent face had captivated his fancy, but he would never have dreamed of making her his wife.

As they neared the boat, so great was the crowd clambering on board, that Mercy would have been separated from her companion had she not clung to his arm.

"You need never go back to the works," he managed to whisper again.

At that moment they stepped aboard the steamer, and started for London.

It had been a happy day for Mercy, but a most miserable one for poor Fred. Contrary to his expectations, he finished the task allotted to him much sooner than he had anticipated, and by two o'clock he was ready to quit the works for the day.

Hurrying home, he quickly changed his clothes, smiling the while as he thought of putting the wish into execution that had been in his heart all day, of joining the crowd up at Barnes, and how delighted Mercy would be to see him—what a surprise it would be to her!

His mother and his cousin watched him out of sight from their door, and then turned back to their duties with a sigh. They had hoped that he would spend the day with them.

With a joyful heart Fred boarded the boat for Barnes, but when he reached there and found that Mercy was not among the group his disappointment knew no bounds.

"My tender-hearted little darling!" he thought. "She would not join them for a day's pleasure because she thought I could not go, and she is having a lonely time of it at home."

Back to the city he posted in all haste, and although the hour was late when he reached there—the clocks in the belfries sounding the

hour of nine—still he could not refrain from stopping a moment at the house, just to let Mercy know how cruelly fate had tricked him.

To his great consternation, he learned there, that Mercy—his Mercy—had left the house at two o'clock that afternoon with handsome Mr. Horton, and that they had started for Greenwich for a day's outing.

He stood quite still, stupefied with amazement too great for words, and a white, awful horror broke over his face and shone in his eyes.

"Tell me about him again!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "What was he like—this man who took Mercy away?" And as he listened to the description his face grew stormy with terrible wrath, for it tallied exactly with that of the man who had put her in the cab and rode away with her.

Like a lightning's flash Fred tore down to the Greenwich pier, and was just in time to catch the outgoing boat. He would surprise them, he told himself, and tear little Mercy, his promised bride, from his rival's arms, or die in the attempt.

All the way Fred paced the deck in a tumult of fury that increased with every breath he drew.

The time that it took to reach his destination seemed as endless as the pangs of purgatory to lost souls. He never knew how that journey was made, or how he reached Greenwich—flaming with lights on this gala night, and gorgeous with flags and gilded banners.

There were few passengers going down. The steamer had come to take the revellers back to the city, and the gang-way was no sooner lowered than the crowd rushed aboard with happy laughter and gay repartee. Among the first to gain a foothold were Leonard Horton and Mercy; and here, face to face, they met—Fred!

"Unhand that young girl!" he cried, sternly, facing Horton. "You have no right to be here with her."

Horton started back, and glanced in haughty amazement at the broad-shouldered, fair-haired young man confronting him.

But without waiting for him to answer Fred turned to Mercy, holding out his hands to her, saying, huskily—

"Leave him, little one, and come with me."

But Mercy threw back her head with rising anger.

"How dare you, Fred Worth!" she cried, stamping her tiny foot, her blue eyes flashing.

"I shall never speak to you again for this—never!"

"Step out of our way," cried Mercy's companion, "and allow this young lady and myself to pass!"

"You shall never pass me with her!" cried Fred, furiously, his hand stealing involuntarily to his breast pocket.

"Step aside; we wish to go on deck!" returned Horton, haughtily, "and we intend to do so!"

"You will never go on deck with her, unless it be over my dead body!" cried Worth, his face white as death, his voice trembling with excitement, and his brown eyes flashing like living coals of fire.

"You cannot prevent me," retorted Horton, in a sneering, contemptuous voice. Then, turning to Mercy, he added: "I am glad that I am here to stand between you and this intrusive fellow. Come; I will thrust him aside, and we will go on deck, my dear."

The familiarity with which he addressed his companion stung Fred to madness.

"You can pass on deck alone, but not one step shall you proceed with that young girl! Try it at your peril!" shouted Fred, hoarsely.

Horton did not heed the terrible warning, but attempted to push past with his companion; and in that instant the passengers crowding up from below heard the wild, piercing, terrified cry of the young girl ring out on the night air, and mingled with it the report of a revolver—three shots in quick succession—and the voice of a man crying out in mortal agony: "I am shot!" and the next instant a beautiful, fair-haired girl plunged from the deck down, down into the dark,

mad waves, and the seething waters closed quickly over her golden head and white, lovely childish face.

In an instant there was the most intense excitement and confusion on board the steamer. Young girls fainted, women cried aloud, and strong men stood fairly paralyzed with horror. Great heaven! the steamer was backing slowly over the spot where the girl had gone down, and where she would reappear. Nothing could save her now.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL in an instant the cry rang from lip to lip: "There's a man overboard!" Will he save her? Oh, heavens! is he too late to save the life of the beautiful, rash girl who had plunged into the mad waters scarcely a moment before, or will it mean death for both of them?

He had disappeared beneath the steamer. The next moment that passed seemed the length of eternity to the horrified spectators who lined the dock and the decks, straining their eyes looking down into the dark waters lighted up so fitfully by the pallid moonlight.

He rose, and a great cry broke from every lip. He was alone, and almost instantly he disappeared again. And again he rose, still alone. Every heart sunk. People held their breath. Useless, useless to hope! The poor girl's fate was sealed.

Then a mighty cheer broke forth. The waters parted, and they saw him again. This time he was making for the shore, holding in one arm the body of the luckless young girl whom he had risked his own life to save.

Suddenly they heard him utter a sharp cry. "A rope! A rope! I am sinking!"

In less time than it takes to tell it a score or more of strong arms hurried one out to him, and he caught it in the nick of time.

And amidst the greatest excitement he was drawn to the deck with his inanimate burden.

So intense had been the excitement that the passengers who had stood nearest the principals in the bitter quarrel which had taken place had lost track entirely of the fact that a tragedy had almost been enacted in their midst.

And when they began to inquire into the matter no one could tell what had become of the man who had cried out that he had been shot, and they considered it a false alarm.

Had this lovely young girl anything to do with this matter, or was it a coincidence that at the self-same moment she had flung herself into the water?

Meanwhile kindly hands took the burden from the young man's arms. As he was drawn on deck some one in the crowd cried out in consternation,—

"Great heavens! It's Fred Worth! And the girl whom he has saved is little Mercy Wood."

There was much speculation as to why the girl had attempted to commit suicide; but Fred's friend, a fellow-workman, declared promptly that it never could have been a case of attempted suicide—the girl must have fallen overboard, and Fred had of course sprung to the rescue.

This looked plausible enough; and what they had all expected to be a great sensation seemed to turn out but an accident pure and simple.

As for Horton, he had suddenly disappeared in the crowd after striking at the revolver which Fred had drawn upon him and crying out mockingly that he was shot when it was discharged, simply to get Fred into trouble and to get sympathy for himself.

They found it no easy matter to restore the girl to consciousness, and at this juncture an old gentleman, a retired doctor who had been in the cabin when the accident had happened, came hurriedly to her assistance when he learned that she was beyond the skill of those attending her in the ladies' cabin.

(To be continued.)

A FULL-GROWN elephant is capable of carrying a load of two tons.

ONLY JENNIE.

—o:—

"SHE is a strange girl," said Mrs. Felton with a sigh, a worried look on her thin face. "So reserved and silent! I do not understand her."

"She is a regular stupid!" jerked out Sam Felton, a boy of eleven years, who was melting out the end of an old fruit tin, and who bore the reputation of being the family wit. "She always signs her name Jane Amy, since she came back. We used to call her Jennie."

She probably thinks it sounds as if she were an authoress or somebody of consequence," remarked Bertha, a girl of fifteen, who was vigorously scouring knives before a table on which were piled the breakfast dishes.

"But her name is Jane Amy," said her younger sister. "I don't blame her for not wanting to be called such a baby name as Jennie. I'm not going to be called Bob any more either; I don't see what mamma named me Robina for. She might have known everybody would call me Bob."

"I think Dinnie is a dood dirl. She dives me nice wed tandy," spoke up another admirer of the young lady who was the subject of conversation in the workaday world of Mrs. Felton's kitchen. The last defender was the youngest of the family, a sweet-natured child of five years.

"Wonder what Jane Amy Felton, I mean, is going to do with the seven huge trunks she brought with her," said Sam.

"I expect she will worry us to make room for them," said Ned, who had picked up a good deal of school-boy slang.

At this point in the conversation Arthur, a tall, pale, scholarly-looking young man of twenty, broke in.

"You forget," he said, "that Jennie is your sister, therefore entitled to your love and respect. It would be well for you to discontinue this sort of conversation. She may overhear you some time."

With this the tall young man, who was a book-keeper in a city office, strode from the room, regarding the imperturbable Sam with unmistakable displeasure.

Not another word was said. There was shame on the countenance of each of the children, and a deeper shade of anxiety and helplessness on the mother's face. But it was too late for contrition; the object of their thoughtless criticism appeared in the doorway leading from the dining-room to the kitchen. The roses faded from the cheeks of Bertha and Robina, while Sam dropped the tin and hung his head. It was evident from her pained expression that she had overheard all.

Life had been a tantalizing chain of blighted prospects to Mr. and Mrs. Felton—some links representing success and prosperity, others failure, misfortune and chagrin. However, the nine children, or rather eight of them, were clothed respectfully and educated fairly. Jennie was the beauty of the family; this fact explains why she was chosen to cheer the grand, yet solitary home of a wealthy uncle and aunt. Surrounded by every luxury, she became a beautiful and accomplished woman. Her aunt and uncle lavished upon her the costliest of jewels, the finest and richest of wearing apparel.

But a time came when black shadows stole upon the too happy prospects of the fair girl. Her uncle became bankrupt, and died of a broken heart; then her aunt fell ill, and after lingering a few months, followed her husband. On the day which was to have been Jennie's wedding-day she followed her aunt to the grave. One week before that her lover was killed in a railway accident. Bereft of guardians, home and lover, the bewildered grief-stricken girl had but one alternative—to go to her father's house until she could map out her future life.

She said little of her sorrows, soon perceiving that her mother's cares were sufficient to bear without her adding to them so much as a feather's weight. Her sisters seem to keep aloof from her, so she kept her grief locked in her own bosom; and it was this unselfishness which

gained her the name of a strange girl. As she listened to the conversation above recorded, it dawned upon her that she, whom the gods had hitherto showered with favours, was now an object of contempt in the only house she could claim; worse than that, she was dependent upon a father who had already too many mouths to feed.

She returned to her room breakfastless. After turning the key in the lock, she stood gazing at the scanty furniture, the faded carpet; the poverty-stricken ugliness of the room seemed to add to the utter desolation of her life. The highly varnished wooden frame which surrounded a snow scene, and the picture itself, done in crayon by her sister Alice in her spare hours after teaching school, looked mean and common to this girl who had gazed enraptured upon the works of some of the great painters.

With a moan full of sorrowful pain Jennie flung herself across the bed and wept bitter tears.

"I am not to blame," she sobbed, with a momentary pang of resentment. "Why did my parents send me from them to be reared so differently from my brothers and sisters? But I loved Aunt Amy, and as it was her desire that I should be called by her name, I will never renounce it, though they all deride me for what they consider mere whim."

Here her tears broke out afresh, and for a half hour flowed unchecked. At the end of that time she heard a timid rap at the door. She arose and opened it, and found Bertha standing there in painful irresolution, flanked on either side by Robina, Sam, Ned, and Dick. Observing the tear-wet eyes of her sister, Bertha with a sob of sympathy in her voice, faltered,—

"Mamma said we should all come up and ask your pardon for what you overheard us say a little while ago. I am very sorry, and I hope you will forgive me."

I didn't say anything against you; I stuck up for you," declared Robina, proudly, as she fixed her truthful and untroubled eyes upon the face of the pleasantly surprised Jenny.

Then came Sam to the front in an awkward, jerky and intrepid manner, but in genuine shame.

"I said you were a stupid," he confessed frankly, yet confusedly, "and I am sorry for it."

Jennie smiled, and immediately took a humorous view of matters which at once put the children at ease.

"Do you mean that you are sorry because I am a stupid, or because you said so?" she asked, at which they laughed in concert, much relieved at this turn in affairs. Sam shouting above the rest, and declaring he did not mean that she was really a nuisance, it was only his way of talking.

"I believe you, Sam," said Jennie, kissing both girls and boys. The latter were rather shy of the fine young lady, but bore the ordeal remarkably well. "And now, as it is late for school, go and ask mamma's consent for a holiday to-day, and we will unpack the seven huge trunks." Here she looked slyly at Ned, who reddened painfully. "We will have a general jolly time in honour of your sister's return home, and of our reconciliation. I think there is a nice present in the trunks for each one of you."

At this the youngsters scampered riotously back to the kitchen to consult their mother. Bertha, the most wayward one of all, and for that reason the most deeply stirred to contrition, soon returned with a cup of tea and a piece of buttered toast.

"Mamma says for you to eat this or you will be sick, as you had no breakfast," said she, putting the tray on a small table. "The boys have sent for a man to help carry up the trunks, and we have permission to stay at home to-day."

While Jennie drank her tea and ate a small piece of the toast, Bertha and Robina sat merrily on their chairs, looking gravely expectant, while Dick and Ned were braced against the wall, as if determined that no amount of flattery should win them to the enemy until they were fully satisfied that the contents of the trunk were up to their standard of excellence.

Jennie surveyed the boys, in whose eyes she

fancied she could detect lurking rebellion, with a sinking heart. She felt that now was the time to test the efficacy of kindness, and to do something to overcome their unjust feelings toward her, but just what course to pursue she could not as yet determine. She had already become convinced that if she would be popular at home she must overcome that contempt for the common things which daily met her view, though the absence of all the elegances in which her soul delighted was a sore deprivation.

While the thoughts were spinning through her brain, Sam and a strong servant-man entered with one of the trunks. Sam was not by any means a surly boy, and only needed to be treated with respect to bring out the better side of his nature. Jennie was keen witted enough to observe this fact, and availed herself of it with the will of an accomplished diplomatist. From the moment she recognised his importance the lad was her firm unflinching friend and helper.

After opening the trunk she said, cheerily,—

"Now, children, not being acquainted with your different tastes, it was of course a little difficult to select presents for you; but I hope each one will be pleased with what falls to his or her lot, from beneath the covers of the trunks still unopened; I see this one contains only my books and music."

She suppressed a sigh at the sight of the music, which reminded her that in the absence of a piano, she must be deprived of the pleasure of gratifying the predominating passion of her life. Then she opened the second trunk. The first thing taken out proved to be a dress piece of maroon-coloured cashmere, which she presented to Bertha. Then followed one of rich, deep blue for Robina. Never before had either girl been the possessor of so fine a dress, and the eyes of each glowed with satisfied pride.

Then came pretty shoes, fine linen handkerchiefs, ribbons, laces, gloves, hose, and everything necessary for a complete outfit for even a city girl. Bertha's eyes grew large with wonder and delight, and Robina declared Jennie to be "a fairy godmother." The light-hearted child never dreamed that her sister had spent almost her last shilling for offerings to her brothers and sisters.

Then followed the other trunks, which contained so many fine and useful things that the room began to have the appearance of a notion store. When the fifth was carried out Jennie distributed the articles as best her judgment directed, each one taking a ponderous load away to some place of deposit. Sam rejoiced in the possession of a set of Dickens's works, and Ned smiled with satisfaction when an atlas of the world fell to his lot. Dick and the others received toys suitable to their years. Nor were the father and mother forgotten. Various things adapted to their condition were received by them with hearty thanks. It was a happy ending to a day so insignificantly begun.

That evening Robina informed her mother that Jennie had ribbons and feathers and laces enough to stock a millinery store.

"I believe she's got as many as ten silk dresses, too," said Dick, hugging tightly the precious parcels containing his presents.

"Pooh!" said Bertha, contemptuously; "you have got a stupendous idea of numbers! She has twenty-five if she has one."

Bertha was given to storing up the long words she heard other people use that she might fit them into her own conversation. They were often misapplied, much to the amusement of the older portion of the family.

Half that night Jennie lay thinking; trying to devise plans for the employment of her time, and to make easier the life of her parents.

"If I only had a piano," she said to herself, "I might take a few scholars in music. I must work. I must crowd as much time-killing exercise into my life as possible, or I shall be driven mad by the haunting scenes of the past. There is nothing left for me but to bravely face the stern realities of life."

She arose early the next morning, and donning her plainest morning dress, went to the breakfast room at a much earlier hour than was her custom. Quietly she took a seat near her father, while the

younger portion of the family stared at her in undisguised surprise.

" You are early this morning," said Arthur, pleasantly.

" Yes," she replied, casting a smiling glance from one to another. " I am going to adopt a rule for early rising, I must not be the only sluggard in a houseful of active people. After breakfast, mamma, you must find some sewing for me to do; I am quite a respectable seamstress."

Mrs. Felton looked at her gratefully.

" I shall be more than glad of your assistance, dear," she said, so gently that tears rushed to Jennie's eyes. Her recent grief made her peculiarly susceptible to kindness.

She was as good as her word, and set to work with a will. So that day passed, and the next, and the weeks went spinning by one after another. Jennie was fast becoming "one of the family." To be sure there were many things to be overcome in her tastes and disposition, many pangs of regret for her inability to better things. The boys' clothing patched and coarse, and their worn shoes; the girls' faded calico dresses and sun-brown straw hats, brought a sigh to her heart. Could she not utilize for them the superabundance of her own wardrobe? The thought no sooner occurred to her than it was acted upon, and Bertha and Robina speedily became young ladies of fashion. So inexhaustible seemed the store from which Jennie brought garments day after day to be remodelled that her mother began to demur.

" You are robbing yourself," she said, " I cannot allow that."

" Indeed, mamma, I am not," answered the generous girl. " The things I have made over would never be of use to me again. I do not need the variety here that I have always been furnished with. I only wish I could put some of my dresses into use for the boys."

" Yes," admitted Mrs. Felton, a shadow of pain crossing her face, " I know their clothing is sadly worn, but their father has had a hard time to make ends meet this summer, and—"

" I did not mean to imply that they were shabby," hastily interrupted Jennie. " I was only wishing I could do something for them."

" You have already lifted a great weight from father's shoulders in providing for the girls. He could never have furnished them with such comfortable winter clothing as you have provided."

" I am truly glad if my efforts are a benefit to him," said Jennie. " It makes me feel less like a dependent."

One day when Jennie and her mother were sewing as usual, Ned came in and held a letter up to view.

" Who will give me a penny for this?" he playfully asked.

" I will not," said the fond mother, with a sparkle in her eye, " for I know it is not for me."

" And I don't believe it is worth a penny if it is for me," said Jennie, laughingly. " However I will pay you that enormous sum, if proves to be worth it."

Ned gave her the letter which she opened and read.

•
" MY DEAR MISS FELTON:—Upon investigation of your uncle's business affairs, I find that all the furniture, including piano and carpets, which were in the suite of rooms you occupied, belongs to you personally. The bills of sale, made out in your name, I found among your uncle's papers. If you will instruct me where to send your goods, I will forward them to you prepaid. If in any way I can ever be of service to you, do not hesitate to apply to your friend,

" MONK TRENT."

" Oh, mamma!" cried Jennie, excitedly, " read this and you will see how kind uncle and aunt were to me!"

She gave the letter to her mother, and fled to her room to hide her emotion.

The next day Jennie told her mother all about Mr. Trent, how he was her uncle's faithful friend and trusted lawyer.

" He is a fine-looking man of upright and noble qualities, and was very kind to me," she concluded.

She looked thoughtfully for a few moments, then said, coaxingly,—

" Now, mamma, let us keep this a secret, and when the goods come, get old Thomas to bring them from the station while the girls and boys are at school, and thus give them a surprise."

Mrs. Felton entered into the scheme readily, and one bright October afternoon, when everything had been arranged, the young folk were led one by one to the parlour, to witness the wonderful transformation there; for Jennie insisted on putting her choicest furniture where all the family could enjoy it.

Bertha was the first to be ushered into the room, and stood like one transfixed. Her feet sank into a handsome carpet, and her eyes stared at rich brocaded curtains, through which were woven threads of gold. Vases of ancient pattern, tall and imposing, stood like sentinels in niche and corner. Great warm-coloured landscapes in deep frames hung on the walls. Luxurious easy-chairs and sofas stood everywhere. But the greatest wonder of all was the fine piano.

" Oh! oh!" cried Bertha. " Is it all true?"

" Yes," laughed Jennie, " as the gospel. Look about all you please, while I admit Robina."

She opened the door the smallest possible space, and demanded in a guttural tone,—

" Password!"

" Chocolate caramels!" Robina quickly answered, never lacking for a piquant reply. " What are you doing? I should judge you were having private theatricals from the words I heard through—"

She paused, struck dumb with what she saw. Then the others were admitted in their turn, and Jennie felt that her surprise had been a success. The evening that followed was the happiest she had known for a long time.

From that day Jennie's small trials were over. All the members of the family recognized her worth; the younger went to her with their little troubles; the older consulted her on all matters which required tact. Even the father and mother asked her advice on many occasions. The one cloud which marred her sky of content was the thought of the overwhelming cares of her father. She knew he was straining every nerve to pay off a mortgage on the house, and the fact turned her sick with apprehension.

" What if papa, with all his efforts, should be unable to pay off the debt? Should we be forced to give up our home?" she thought. " Something must be done, and at once."

In Jennie's earnestness to be of benefit to the family, she employed every moment. She taught the girls music, and at night made the boys' school lessons easy and interesting to them by her ready knowledge and plain explanations. She solicited music scholars of some of the wealthier residents of the town, and soon had more applicants than she could attend to. Nevertheless, she was dissatisfied with such a slow way of earning money.

" It is slavish, unprofitable employment," she said to herself one night, in the stillness of her room. " And I am so anxious to earn enough to justify me in insisting that papa shall not work so hard. It makes my heart ache to see him struggling to perform his daily duties."

She sat a long time reflecting and watching the dying coals in the grate, revolving in her mind a thousand impracticable schemes for making money. Suddenly she recalled a conversation held between her father and Arthur that night at table. Mr. Felton had just come from a visit to a lifelong friend.

" Mr. Armstrong is very ill," he said, " and realises his danger. He requested me to find sale for sixteen hundred bushels of wheat which he has on hand, and which he offers at a very low price in order to make a quick sale, as he wishes to arrange everything possible for the welfare of his only child. All his other affairs are adjusted; he wants to turn his wheat into money to add to that already on interest."

" How much does he ask for the wheat?" inquired Arthur.

" By taking the sixteen hundred bushels it can be had for a very low price. It is a wonderful chance for a speculation for any one who has

a hundred and thirty pounds," added Mr. Morehouse, with a sigh.

" Yes," replied Arthur, " that would be quite enough to clear the mortgage."

He stopped speaking suddenly, and his mind seemed diverted into another channel. His face grew white, and a look of trouble came into his eyes.

Jennie regarded him attentively for a moment; this seemed to increase his embarrassment, a fact she was not slow to discover. Feeling that the cause of his confusion was no insignificant thing, she resolved to sound him at the first opportunity.

But just now there were other things to think of. She arose presently, and providing herself with writing materials, penned a letter to Mr. Trent.

" You have so repeatedly offered to be of service to me," she wrote, " that I cannot better convince you of my appreciation of your kindness than by accepting it. Is your friend, Mr. Vigo, still dealing in grain? To-day I heard it said that wheat was bringing an almost unprecedented price, owing to some cause which you probably understand better than I can explain. Will you be kind enough to find out what he will give per bushel, and if he will buy sixteen hundred bushels? Telegraph to me as soon as you learn the highest price he will offer, and when my plans are perfected I will make all necessary explanations."

After directing her letter Jennie went to her dressing-case and unlocked one of the drawers, taking from it a crimson plush case. This she opened with a small key, and exposed to view a set of scintillating diamonds. She gazed at them for a moment, and then put her hand over her eyes, as if to shut out the memories awakened by the costly gems. A tear found its way through her white fingers, and dropped on the jewels.

" Tears and diamonds," she whispered. " How many in this world have tears, and how few diamonds! Uncle was very kind and indulgent to me, but would he approve of my selfishly keeping these gems, when they could be the means of making so many hearts happy?"

She took a necklace from its bed and held it to the light.

" Go," she said, " with your companions, on your errand of mercy; but may you return to me again, for it would be bitter pain to part with uncle's gift for all time."

With more than usual care Jennie dressed herself the next morning, and there was no lagging in her steps as she set out on her errand, carrying in her hand the jewel case and its contents. Straight to a pawnbroker's she went, and laid before the cashier her diamonds, saying simply,—

" They are worth four hundred pounds, and I want to raise a loan on them for a few days."

The sight of the dazzling jewels so astonished the manager that he forgot for a moment that Jennie was waiting for his answer. Then, after asking a few ordinary questions, he counted out the required amount, and she went out into the morning sunlight with a heart ready to burst with joy.

She at once proceeded to Arthur's office, to find him in sore distress over the fact that the man who held the mortgage was making arrangements to foreclose. She looked terrified, and for a moment her heart seemed to stop beating; but suddenly she remembered that she had the means to stay the cruel proceedings, even though she had to let the diamonds go. Instantly she made up her mind that in case Mr. Trent should telegraph an adverse answer to her letter, she would order the jewels to be sold at once, even at a sacrifice.

" They shall not take our home, Arthur," she said, with a momentary flash of fury in her fine eyes.

Then she took him into her confidence, and straightway they went and negotiated for the wheat. After that they could only wait patiently for the telegram from Mr. Trent. In a few days it came. Mr. Vigo would buy the wheat, the money payable at the pawnbroker's where she had deposited her diamonds.

Jennie was wild with excitement; the telegram came just in time to save her father the

pain of knowing how near he came to losing the old home.

The wheat brought three hundred and fifty pounds. Jennie redeemed her jewels, then paid off the mortgage, and placed the amount remaining in the bank to her father's credit. He could now enjoy a holiday if he chose, and rest temporarily from his labours.

There was a grand family meeting in the parlour that night, and Jennie rejoiced to see the look of content in the eyes of her parents, and the happiness of her brothers and sisters. With the payment of the mortgage all were relieved of a heavy burden, and she felt that she was no longer "only Jennie" in her father's house, but its prop and stay.

FACETIA.

THE bad small boy, when his mother calls, is like the echo. He answers, but he doesn't come.

YOUNG SWELL : "I should like to have my moustache dyed." Polite Barber : "Certainly ; did you bring it with you?"

WHEN a man owes more to his hatter than he does to his shoemaker, is he supposed to be "head over heels in debt"?

Love is blind, according to the proverb, and according to the pictures he dresses as if he thought other people were.

EVERY woman is sorry for some other woman on account of something her husband told her about the other woman's husband.

It happens sometimes that when a man has fallen in love and lost his head, the object of his affections puts her own on his shoulder.

RAILWAY Passenger : "Why don't you sing out the names of the stations clearly?" Porter (to his mate) : Hi, Bill ! 'ere's a cove as expects opera singers at porters' wages."

"ROBERTS fell off a thirty-foot ladder and wasn't hurt a bit." "Not hurt? I don't believe it." "It's quite true. He fell off the bottom rung."

"HELLO, Jones! What are you doing with your coat buttoned up to your chin? Are you sick?" Jones : "Hush—don't mention it. I have on a tie that my wife selected."

PA : "One of our boys has been stealing raisins again; I have found the seeds on the floor. Was it you, Tommy?" Tommy : "It wasn't me. I swallowed the seeds in mine."

"SHE is a perfect Amazon." "Why do you say that? She is not at all like the Amazons of old." "Oh no; I mean like the river. She has a large mouth and bubbles on for ever."

"Do you suffer from stage fright?" asked Adlet of the famous tragedian. "Oh yes," he replied. "One of the ugliest girls in the ballet is in love with me."

"Come into the cabin," said the captain to the diver, "and have a drink." "Thanks. Guess I will," returned the diver. "This submarine business is pretty dry work."

It is difficult for the belated clubman to realize that the towering female who stands at the head of the stairs is the timid little girl who once fainted in his arms at the sight of a mouse.

BRIGHTON lodging-house. Landlady (to servant) : "What do you mean by staying out so long? I told you you could go out for an hour's walk." "Oh, please, ma'm, I'm such a slow walker."

"DOCTOR," said the sufferer, as he dropped into the dentist's chair, "my nerve is completely gone." "Oh no, it isn't," was the cheerful reply. "Wait till I get a firm hold and you'll realize your mistake."

A BARRISTER tormented a poor German witness so much with questions that the old man declared he was so exhausted that he must have a drink of water before he could say another word. Upon this the judge remarked, "I think, sir, you must have done with the witness now, for you have pumped him dry."

SCENE.—Teacher with reading class—Boy (reading) : "And as she sailed down the river—" Teacher : "Why are ships called she?" Boy (alive to the responsibilities of his sex) : "Because they need men to manage them."

It's very easy to start false reports. Just because a woman, while buying a broom, wanted one with a heavy and strong handle, it was reported round the village that she was in the habit of beating her husband.

"So our old school friend is practising law," said the man who was visiting his native town. "Yep." "Is he a criminal lawyer?" "Well, I don't know as you could call him that. He's managed to keep from gettin' arrested so far."

MARY (angrily) : "I think you are the biggest fool in town, John." JOHN (mildly) : "Well, Mary, mother used to tell me that when I was a boy, but I never thought she was right about it, until I married you."

HEAD CLERK (in a large concern) : "You are hardly twenty-two and already want to get married. A large dowry, I suppose?" Clerk : "No, sir." "Then you are in love?" "No; but I should like to have a week's holiday."

DEALER : "This is the best parrot we have, but I wouldn't sell him without letting you know his one fault; he'll swear if his food doesn't suit him." Miss Fitz : "I'll take him; it will seem quite like having a man in the house."

MIKE : "It's like owd times to see you again, Pat. Why did you never write me a letter since last we met?" Pat : "Oi didn't know yer address, Moike." Mike : "Thin why, in the name o' sience, did ye not write for it?"

"PA," said little Johnny M'Swillinan, "here's a piece in the paper about 'Parasites.' What are they?" "Parasites, my boy, are people who live in Paris. I think you ought to know that, and you in the Third Reader."

"MR. MURPHY," said Danny Cahill, "is that you that's learnin' to play the trombone?" "It's myself, sure enough." "Well, there's only wan thing I wish yez." "Phwah! that?" "May yez live to play yer own funeral march!"

MR. MORGESTEIN : "You diinks yourself a great veller, hain't it? Vy, I remember your fader was nodding but de city hangman!" Mr. Goldfink : "Dat's so, mine frent, and I remember your fader was de last man he hangt."

FIRST MALE : "Women must often want to swear, but, of course, they can't." SECOND Ditto : "They don't, eh? If scolding the servants and slapping the baby to relieve one's feelings isn't a form of profanity, I'd like to know what it is."

DISCERNING Child (who has heard some remark by papa) : "Are you our new nurse?" Nurse : "Yes, dear." Child : "Well, then, I am one of those boys who can only be managed by kindness; so you had better get some sponge cake and oranges at once."

"COME up to my house to-morrow night," said Herpeque; "I am going to celebrate my golden wedding." "Golden wedding! Why, man, you've only been married three years." "I know it, but it seems like fifty; so everything is all right."

SISTER : "Tom, father says you're to come home at once; he wants to speak to you." Tom (who has been playing leap-frog) : "What does he want me for?" Sister : "He didn't say; but he went out to cut a willow rod as I left the house."

PURCHASER : "Now, remember, you warrant this horse not to be afraid of trains." Dealer (pocketing the money) : "That's all right. He ain't afraid of trains. He ain't afraid of nutthin' 'cept bicycles an' flying leaves an' pieces o' paper, an' such things."

AMY (on a visit) : "Why were you so cross to your husband at breakfast?" Maude : "I just couldn't help it. I felt as if I must scold somebody or burst. Just physical irritability, you know—and then everything went wrong. Breakfast was late, the steak burnt, the coffee thin, and the eggs hard." Amy : "Then why didn't you scold the cook?" Maude : "Oh, I couldn't. She'd leave."

MRS. MAWKINS ABROAD.—"Did you see Vesuvius, Mrs. Mawkins, when you were in Italy?" "Yes, indeed. We spent a morning at the ruins of Pompey. It must have been awful when that volcano began pouring out them ashes and saliva over things."

ADVANTAGE FOR ONE.—She : "Well, if I can't live on my income, and you can't live on yours, where would be the advantage in our marrying?" He (thoughtfully) : "Well, by putting our incomes together one of us would be able to live at any rate."

A MILITARY captain, desirous of inspiring a soldier with patriotic sentiments, asked him the following question : "What would you think if you saw a banner waving over the field of battle?" "I should think the wind was blowing," was the man's reply.

"AND he had the assurance to tell you to your face that our people went into this thing to make money! Why didn't you give him the lie?" "Well, to tell you the truth, I didn't think he needed it. He seemed to be fully competent to manufacture all the lies he wanted."

"LITTLE boy, do you understand what is meant by energy and enterprise?" "No, sir, I don't think I do." "Well, I will tell you. One of the richest men came here without a shirt to his back, and now he has got millions." "Millions! How many does he put on at a time?"

FIRST TRAMP : "Well, how much did you get out of the felly?" SECOND Tramp : "Faix, only just enough for myself." "And is this de way yer stand in wid me, Mickey?" "Sure, all Oi got was a kick. Ye can take yer share of that if ye want to."

"I HAVE been married now," boasted a prosy old fellow, "more than thirty years, and have never given my wife a cross word." "That's because you never dared, uncle," said his little nephew, who lived with him. "If you had, auntie would have made you jump quicker than anything."

A GENTLEMAN was deeply in love. He met the object of his affections one evening at a crowded ball, and as he could not find an opportunity of talking to her, he contrived to slip into her hand a piece of paper with the words "Will you?" written upon it. The reply was equally brief, "Won't I?"

UNCLE MONEYBAGS (winding up a lecture) : "You have acted shamefully, and are going to the dogs as fast as you can; it's money and more money all the while. This must cease. I speak plainly and believe in calling a spade a spade." Spendthrift Nephew : "That is no reason for calling me rake."

"YOUR husband has started a great many enterprises, I believe?" "He has." "How has he succeeded?" "Failed in everything." "Too bad!" "But he has got hold of something now that will hold water, I think." "Ah, indeed!" "Yes; he has gone into the milk business."

Two American ladies who had been waiting while the chaplain was reading prayers entered the portals of the House of Lords just as two peers were taking the oath, and inquiring from an official what was happening : "Peers swearing," was the answer. The lady turning to her companion, exclaimed, "Fancy, Jane, and so soon after prayers."

"GEORGE," she screamed. "My neck!" "What's the matter?" "There's a pillacatter—" "A what?" "A tappekiller—" "What in the world do you mean?" "Oh, dear," she moaned, as she clutched him frantically. "A kitterpaller! You know, George! A kitterpaller!" "Oh," said George, with evident relief, and he proceeded to brush the future butterfly away.

In a battle our army was, at one point, closely pressed by the enemy, and as the general was riding about encouraging the men, he espied an Irishman running away. The general, stopping him, exclaimed, "Surely, Pat, you're never running away from the enemy?" Pat replied, "Faith, general, they tell me the world's round, so I'm running round the world to attack the enemy in the rear!"

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SOCIETY.

EVERY dress or jacket now being made has some sort of revers about it, either singly or in pairs.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales will entertain a succession of visitors during their present residence at Sandringham.

THERE will be much rejoicing at the happy issue of Lady Randolph Churchill's very serious illness, which at one stage gave rise to the gravest anxiety. Lady Randolph's brightness and beauty have combined to render her a very popular figure in social circles, and her temporary withdrawal and its regrettable cause have been sincerely and widely deplored.

VERY tiny muffs may be regarded as jokes, scarcely worth the trouble of carrying, save as an ornament or a hiding-place for an indifferent pair of gloves; but rumour has it that extremely large ones are to see daylight again; also, that they will be suspended from the neck by those long gold chains which went out of favour some twenty years ago.

LARGE quantities of iron and glass have arrived at Sigmaringen, with which an enormous winter garden is to be made, in anticipation of the marriage of the Crown Prince of Roumania with the Princess Marie of Edinburgh. The German Emperor has signified his intention of being present with the Empress at the ceremony, but we hear that the Czar will be represented by one of the numerous Russian Grand Dukes at the marriage of his niece, and, it is whispered, because he would rather not meet the Emperor William there.

An agent has been sent to Florence to engage a villa for the Queen, and her Majesty proposes to stay there for a month from about the 24th of March. This agent has inspected every eligible villa in and around Florence, but no arrangement has yet been made. Court etiquette prevents the Queen from occupying a Royal residence, as she travels *incognito* as Countess of Balmoral; but it has been suggested from Rome that some special arrangement might be made which would enable her Majesty to reside at the magnificent Villa Petraia, which stands in beautiful grounds on the Pistoja road.

In Paris the Empire craze is so universal that even shoemakers are showing Empire slippers, laced over the instep to wear with the Josephine gowns. The latter, being always rather short in front, show pretty foot to advantage, but flat insteps and large joints are not improved by the encircling ribbons. Parisian dressmakers have invented a fashion, however, which, if we are to judge from pictures, did not prevail in Josephine's day, and that is of making a perfectly fitting bodice of silk or satin showing the dainty waist and graceful lines of the figure through an Empire cut front of gauze lace or any other transparent material. This is what in ethics or theology would be called "beating the devil around the bush," as it conforms to an unbecoming fashion without detracting in the least from the beauty of natural lines and contour.

WERE it not for the dangers which continually surround her husband, and the anxiety which she suffers with regard to the failing health of her second son the Grand Duke George—so named after her favourite brother—the Czarina would be the happiest crowned lady in Europe. She is devoted to her husband, and he to her. The Czarina is naturally light-hearted, never so happy as when she can indulge in her favourite amusement of dancing, and as fond of dress and jewellery as any girl. Her husband knows her fondness for precious stones, and it is not long ago that he presented her with a necklace of uniquely large emeralds, which had been collected from all parts of the world. The terrors which she has gone through and which ever haunt her, have also affected her nerves and her spirits, and now she is always happiest when she is in Denmark, where for a short time she can dismiss all fear of a repetition of the terrible tragedy of March 1881, in which the late Czar lost his life.

STATISTICS.

THE Thames flows at the rate of two miles an hour.

A LONDON omnibus carries over 2,500 passengers a week.

ONLY one man in two hundred and three is over six feet in height.

WOMEN of to-day are, on an average, two inches taller than they were 25 years ago.

EUROPEAN statistics show that there are one hundred accidents per year for each ten thousand working-men, one-half of which are fatal, and one-fourth of which produce permanent injuries.

PROFIT on cheap literature is said to be about as follows:—A "shilling shocker" pays its expenses when it has sold 4,000 copies; a three-shilling book, upon which grade and all higher grades the price of the cover has to be accounted for, becomes profitable after it has sold 1,500; a six-shilling book when it has sold 1,000; a two-volume library book when it has sold 400; and a three-volume book when it has sold 300.

GEMS.

IT is not knowledge, but little knowledge, that puffeth up.

IF there were no troubles to talk about, some people would be always silent.

SINCERITY is speaking as we think, believing as we pretend, acting as we profess, performing as we promise, and being as we appear to be.

A MAN does not become celebrated in proportion to his general capacity, but because he does or says something which happened to need doing or saying at the moment.

SIDNEY SMITH truly says that mankind are always happier for having been happy; so that, if you make them happy now, you make them happy twenty years hence by the fond memory of it.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PORK SCRAPS.—To make what are called pork scraps, cut a quarter of a pound of fat salt pork into very small square pieces, put them into a frying pan, stirring them frequently until the fat is extracted, and the scraps are done light brown.

POTATO STRAWS.—Potatoes, boiling lard or oil. Peel the potatoes, cut them in long narrow strips, dry each one with a cloth, and shake them in flour; put the lard or oil in a saucepan, and when quite boiling put in the potatoes, and let them get a golden colour; drain on blotting-paper, sprinkle salt over, and serve immediately.

STEWED CALF'S FOOT.—Well stew a calf's foot and stew or bake it in one pint of milk and one of water, with pepper and salt, the grated peel of a lemon, and a blade of mace, for three or four hours. If liked, celery may be added; and half a teacupful of cream stirred in is a great improvement.

BOILED MACARONI.—An authority says that in boiling macaroni it is fatal to permit it to stop boiling for a moment until done. Have plenty of salted water in the saucepan at the boiling point when the sticks are added, and when they are tender throw in a glass of cold water to stop the cooking suddenly, and drain at once. After that it may be served in various ways.

RICE SHAPE.—Boil a quarter of a pound of well-washed rice in enough milk to make it swell and soften—about a pint will do—flavour it with vanilla or any flavouring fancied, and sweeten to taste. Stir it after it is cooled till nearly cold, to prevent a skin forming over it; then add a cupful of cream or rich milk and about an ounce of leaf gelatine dissolved in a very little water; pour it into a mould and let it set. Serve with preserve or stewed fruit.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SLOPING shoulders are slowly but surely returning.

"God Save the Queen" has been translated into fifteen languages.

If London streets were put end to end they would reach from that city to St. Petersburg.

KANGAROO tail is a dish in much request amongst Australians; it is really a delicacy.

THE Forth Bridge is capable of sustaining the weight of two ironclads slung from the centre waterway.

Of Shakespeare's famous characters it is said that Hamlet speaks 1,569 lines, Iago 1,067, Othello 650, and Lear 770.

AMONGST the natives of the West Indies baked snakes are a great feature in the menu, with palm-tree snout beetles.

MASSAGE has been practised from the very earliest times. Three thousand years before the Christian era, the Chinese practised it, and they do at the present time.

IRELAND has only eight theatres—three in Dublin, one in Belfast, one in Cork, one in Limerick, one in Waterford, and one in Londonderry.

TWO-BALL billiards is a game fast coming into favour with the experts. To count, a player must hit the object ball twice with the cue ball at each shot.

A CERTAIN scientist estimates that the Dead Sea will become a solid mass of salt within five hundred years. This prophecy ought not to have immediate effect upon the mining market.

THE modern Persians have a strong aversion to red hair. The Turks on the contrary are warm admirers of it. In China small round eyes are liked. But the great beauty of a Chinese lady is in her feet.

THE greatest day's run of an ocean steamship was about 515 miles. The steamer in question was 562 feet long, and had previously been known to make 500 miles per day for three days in succession.

YOU can give an Eskimo exquisite enjoyment by the present of a pound of tallow-dips, which one after the other he will draw gently through his teeth, not willing to lose a particle of its flavour.

THE hump on the back of the dromedary is an accumulation of a peculiar species of fat, which is a store of nourishment beneficially provided against the day of want to which the animal is often exposed. The dromedary or camel can exist for a long period upon this hump without any other food.

WHEN the muscles are tired and worn from mechanical work that requires but little attention of the brain, stop motion and set the brain at work. The labourer can read, think, and speak while his brains are at rest. His brain need not be idle because the hammer or chisel has dropped from his weary hand.

It has been long noted in the gymnasiums that those who train the most persistently give out the quickest. The cause of it is that they develop the muscles at the expense of the nervous strength. But there is a moderation in both, which means better health and longer life, and to the majority of those who enter on gymnasium-work that is what is sought rather than "recording" capabilities.

IN Paris they seem to be carrying realism to ugly lengths in things other than literature. An authority on such subjects tells us that the modish Frenchwoman now walks abroad wearing a singularly unbecoming purple veil. The universal use of cosmetic making a veil of some kind necessary, she chooses a purple one because it gives her a blue and generally pinched-up appearance—the appearance a biting east wind gives an unpowdered, unpainted face. By so doing she hopes, one must suppose, to escape the imputation of "make-up." But it is not often that a woman wishes to be ugly in order to be believed natural; most incline rather to a fascinating artificiality.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MOLLY-CODDLE.—The 19th century will close with the year 1900.

M. G. O.—Metz surrendered to the German army October 27, 1870.

THREE OLD MAIDS.—The duty on tea is now 4d. on the pound weight.

A LOVER OF THE SEA.—Average run to Buenos Ayres is about 70 days for a sailing ship.

BARBAROSSA.—From New York to Chicago is about 800 miles.

NAT.—Colonel Burnaby was killed at Abu Klea, in 1885.

A LOVER OF YOUR PAPER.—Your best plan is to write all particulars to the Secretary, War Office, Pall Mall.

SCOTIE.—The first volume published by Burns was issued in 1780, at Kilmarnock.

JANEY.—A hawker's license runs for twelve months in any part of the United Kingdom.

ONE IN THE TRADE.—The Chinese control almost the entire shoemaking business in California.

SEEKING ADVICE.—These Continental lotteries are all swindles. Have nothing to do with them.

VEXATION.—Any person may be summoned as a jurymen at a coroner's inquest.

C. R.—Copies of all wills are deposited at the General Registry, Somerset House, London.

QUEEN OF SHEBA.—A woman legally separated from her husband still legally bears her husband's name.

BOTHERED.—Every person has by birth the nationality of his father, irrespective of the place of birth.

HORSPUR.—Lord Cardigan, who led the charge at Balaklava, returned to England, and died in 1868.

ARGUER.—Captain Webb lost his life in an attempt to swim the whirlpool rapids below Niagara.

INQUISTIVE.—We have no knowledge of the personage you name, nor can we suggest how it is to be obtained.

E. A. R.—You had better consult a lawyer. A man cannot marry again unless his wife is dead or he has obtained a divorce.

A CONSTANT READER.—Nothing can be done to prevent the growing, and the only way to get rid of them is by pulling them out by the roots as fast as they grow.

A LOVER OF THE READER.—We have no information on the subject. Hilda, from the Saxon, means My support.

ONE WHO LOVES MUSIC.—Before trying to learn to play the pianoforte, we would strongly advise you to improve your spelling and writing.

PRETTY POLL.—You have no legal right to see your mother's bank-book. She can do what she likes with her own money.

R. T.—You will not be liable for the machine if you return it. If you keep it you can be made to pay for it. That is only fair.

ROY.—The Victoria is the only tartan associated with the Queen, although her son wears of right the Royal Stuart.

TOBY.—You are over the age for entering the Royal Navy now. No doubt you might get on well in the United States.

ANXIETY.—Such a marriage as you mention is null and void, and the children illegitimate. That is punishment enough.

W. T.—You will find a list of excisable articles in Whitaker's Almanack. You can order it through any bookseller.

SWEET WILLIAM.—The clock tower in the Houses of Parliament is 318 feet high. The dial of the clock is 23 feet 6 inches in diameter.

H. O.—If the articles have no hall-mark in addition to the 18 or 18c, there is no guarantee of genuineness at all.

EMIGRANT.—Write to Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W. There is only one office in the kingdom.

ETIQUETTE.—Present the younger to the older person, the gentleman to the lady, the less distinguished to the principal figure in the party.

COLOURLESS.—We cannot suggest anything, we are sorry to say. We never recommend cosmetics of any description. We are very glad to hear you like the "London Reader" so much.

G. C.—If they agree together persons of any religion can get married and attend their different places of worship. It is usual in such cases to be married according to the rites of both Churches.

P. M.—There is no recruiting in England for the police forces you name. Men are to be found on the spot. You might emigrate and then join. Your experience in the army would be to your advantage.

AN UNHAPPY WIFE.—If your husband uses actual violence towards you at any time you can apply to a magistrate for a separation order with maintenance. If you had read the marriage service over before using it you would have found that you took your husband for "better or worse."

D. E. B.—A depositor in a post office-bank can put money anywhere else he thinks fit, except in a savings bank; no restriction beyond that.

LITTLE DORRIT.—If you rub your mirrors and window-glass with a clean cloth wet in kerosene oil, then polish with newspapers, the glass will be beautifully transparent.

INQUIRER.—It is of no use or value whatever, and the advertisement is inserted only for the purpose of extracting money from those who are weak-minded and foolish enough to believe in it.

JEMIMA.—The value of fruit imported by us from France is about £850,000 annually, and includes such as olives, chestnuts, walnuts, almonds, citrons, figs, plums, apples, and pears.

VIOLET.—A new waterproof ought not to let in rain. Try the effect of beeswax rubbed on the wrong side of seams and parts where the rain enters, passing a warm iron over it with a cloth between the iron and the wax.

BERT.—Provvidence is in Rhode Island. Certainly healthy compared with English and Scotch manufacturing cities. It has extensive cotton and woollen factories and iron works.

ROLF.—You are not likely to get the birth of stewardship in a ship unless you know something of seamanship or are willing to learn. You must join as a sailor before the mast. Offer yourself to a captain short of hands.

THREE KISSES OF FAREWELL.

THREE, only three, my darling,
Separate, solemn, slow;
Not like the swift and joyous ones
We used to know
When we kissed because we loved each other,
Simply to taste love's sweet,
And lavish our kisses as the summer
Lavishes heat;
But as they kiss whose hearts are wrung
When hope and fear are spent,
And nothing is left to give, except
A sacrament!

First of the three, my darling,
I sacred unto pain;
We have hurt each other often;
We shall again;
When we pine because we miss each other,
And do not understand
How the written words are so much colder
Than eye and hand,
I kiss thee, dear, for all such pain
Which we may give or take;
Buried, forgiven, before it comes,
For our love's sake.

The second kiss, my darling,
Is full of joy's sweet thrill;
We have blessed each other always,
We always will.
We shall reach until we find each other
Past all of time and space;
We shall listen till we hear each other
In every place.
The earth is full of messengers
Which love sends to and fro;
I kiss thee, darling, for all joy
Which we shall know!

The last kiss, oh, my darling,
My love—I cannot see
Through my tears as I remember
What it may be.
We may die and never see each other,
Die with no time to give
A sign that our hearts are faithful
To die, as live.
Tokens of what they will not see
Who see our parting breath,
This one last kiss, my darling, seals
The seal of death.

S. H.

GUS.—The only method of obtaining the information as to terms of apprenticeship to an engineering firm in North America is to communicate with the friends you say you have got there, and learn their terms through them.

SHORTHAND.—Pitman's has been in extensive use for between 50 and 60 years, improvements being made upon it from time to time as experience suggested them, and it still holds the field against all other systems amongst press reporters.

A. L.—No special number of people are required to open a club. You can open one yourself if you like. You do not get a license from the Custom House, but from the Inland Revenue authorities. Apply to your local excise officer.

A. S. S.—Large sums in gold are weighed, not counted. The sum you mention—£100,000—is called a plum. Amongst the merchants on the Continent, in former days, this sum was expressed by "a ton of gold," which always meant £100,000.

JIM.—Steam is said to be one of the best known cleansers of type which has become dirty through constant use or through carelessness in washing forms. A steam jet should be so placed that the forme or galley of type can be laid under it. Then the type should be loosened up, and the steam forced into it. This will not only remove all the dirt, but give the type an appearance of being almost new. Live steam is to be employed.

HARD LUCK.—Shopmen, as a rule, have a poor chance in the colonies. If you are able to turn your hand to farming or any other outdoor work, you can sail from Liverpool to Fremantle for £14 1s. third class. You give us no idea, however, of what you can do.

P. B.—Americans do not need to advertise in English papers for workpeople. They may occasionally advertise in their local organs for servants, shop assistants, &c., as we do here, but there are always hundreds on the spot ready to respond to the advertisement.

ARON.—The law lays down no rules as to what a man may or may not call himself. The principle followed is this: there must not be any misrepresentation in the description you give of yourself. If you use any term calculated to mislead, you will be liable to proceedings.

MAB.—Tornadoes originate in the tropics, and are chiefly found in five localities—the West Indies, Bengal Bay and the Chinese coast, north of the equator and in the South Indian Ocean, off Madagascar, and in the South Pacific, near Samoa.

QUARREL SOME KITTY.—When a young lady goes to a ball with a man that she knows to be at variance with her affianced lover, and tells the latter that she did so for the purpose of "spitting him," we think he would be justified in reconsidering his intention to marry her.

DON.—The quotation, "Who shall decide when doctors disagree, and soundest casuists doubt like you and me?" was written by Alexander Pope, "Moral Essays," Epistle 3, line 1. The original did not apply to doctors of medicine, but to doctors of philosophy.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—We believe the bank to be thoroughly safe, and would certainly recommend it if our rule did not prevent us from recommending any investment. The bank has passed through an experience that would have brought it down if it had been in any degree shaky.

BILLY.—You cannot enlist on board a U.S. warship in this country, and if you wish to do so in a U.S. port you must go out as an ordinary steerage passenger at a cost of about £6. You may be able to tell yourself what you are going to get for your money. The U.S. navy is no paradise.

V. B.—1. A man convicted of crime, not a mere police offence, is a criminal. 2. Neither Militia nor Volunteers could be "called out" for foreign service, but both might be given opportunity, or, as was the case with the Militia during the Crimean War, to volunteer for foreign service.

POOR MILLY.—A young man who will conduct himself in the manner you describe must be very dishonourable or exceedingly lacking as to sense. The less you have to do with him the better. If, after declaring his love repeatedly for two years, he has not been able to make up his mind whether or not he is under obligations to treat the young lady in the case with proper courtesy in public, he should be put through a course of instruction by some stalwart father or big brother.

DOT.—Extremely high heels on women's shoes are not worn so much as they formerly were. Many women have found out, without aid from the scientific, that this causes suffering. "Quite short women," says a dealer, "often insist upon these artificial helps to elevate them; but tall persons ought never to wear them at all, because they render their walk ungraceful. There are no tall women who can add an inch or more to their height and retain a natural grace of motion. Short persons get along somewhat better, but it is a mistaken plan to wear high-heeled shoes. They are awkward things, and ought never to be worn indoors, particularly when there is much travelling up and down stairs to be done. For the latter they are positively painful to the forward part of the feet.

SUFFERER.—We see thousands of those who should wear glasses young and old, male and female—endeavouring to read, write, sew, and work with aching eyes who might with glasses perform all duties without discomfort or injury. It should never be forgotten that the difficulty in reading, writing, &c., which comes on so commonly about middle life is in no sense a disease or an evidence of decay, but is the effect of a purely natural change which takes place in all healthy eyes. It is due to a consistency of the crystalline lens, which, becoming more solid, yields less to the influence of the accommodation muscle. It is folly, therefore, to fight against or lament over the inevitable; and when this condition, which is called "presbyopia," manifests itself, it should at once be relieved by wearing suitable glasses.

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† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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